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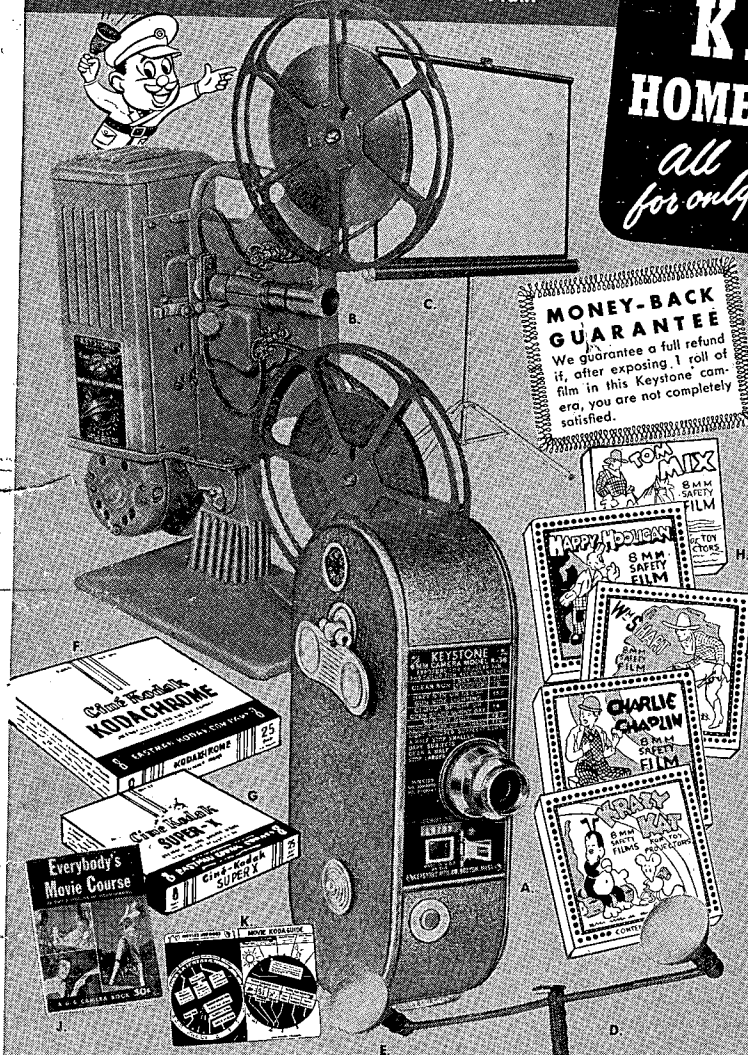
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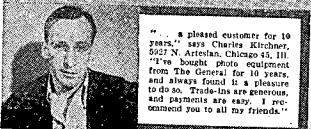
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Published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. New York Office, Empire State Building, New York 3, N.Y. Entered as second class matter June 3, 1947, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional second class entry, Holyoke, Massachusetts. Subscription: in U. S., Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions \$2.50 for 12 issues, all other foreign countries \$3.50 for 12 issues. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.

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The

OBSERVATORY

..... *by the Editor*

A FEW DAYS before this column was written, press and radio news services reported, a little breathlessly, that a gigantic explosion had occurred on Mars. It seems that a cloud of smoke or dust (reports varied) had inexplicably shot up some fifty miles above that planet's surface—a cloud estimated to be perhaps 500 miles in diameter.

THE AVERAGE citizen, upon getting word of this phenomenon, probably said something like "do tell" or "the hell you say" and forgot about it. But not the readers of AMAZING STORIES. The telephones in our editorial offices began a frenzied ringing and, by the following day, letters began pouring in. Many asked for our interpretation of the news (we ducked out of any commitment!); but the majority had pretty positive explanations of their own and wanted us to know them.

WHAT PLEASED us was that a good many of the "explanations" were even more logical than might have been expected under the circumstances. The almost unanimous finding was that the explosion proved there were intelligent beings on Mars. Some were certain that the blast was atomic in nature and either in the nature of a test or, more imaginatively, an episode in a war between Martian nations. Other theories: some nation on Earth had fired a space missile at Mars, with an atomic warhead to indicate the target had been hit; another planet had launched an attack on Mars; Mars was beginning to disintegrate through natural causes, or the flying saucers were responsible. The most startling theory as far as we were concerned came from one of our writers, who calmly told us that the Martians, upset by our discovery of atomic energy, had launched superbombs at Earth—bombs that might require months before they came raining down upon our unprotected heads! We don't believe that one either, and as soon as we finish laughing about it, we'll uncross our fingers!

OUT OF ALL this, however, comes one interesting, and perhaps important, fact: a lot of people are beginning to think of interplanetary space in about the same way that King Arthur, say, regarded the Atlantic Ocean: it could probably be crossed, but only a fool would want to try it! Fortunately for the world's progress there have always been a number of "fools"; and as long as humanity will accept the once unacceptable theory that space is not an impassable barrier, then somebody's going to make the attempt—and succeed!

TO THOSE of you who've been asking how Ray Palmer is doing these days—the answer is: "fine!" His two magazines he tells us, are making enough money to support the Marshall Plan practically unassisted! We've known Ray intimately since 1942 and he's never looked better; in fact, he's beginning to lose that haggard look common to all editors and is taking on the sleek, almost portly appearance common among successful publishers.

ONE OF THE better writers of science-fiction, Robert Moore Williams, came up from St. Louis to see us recently. He's another of the group of authors whom the current upsurge of interest in science-fiction is affecting profitably. Not only are magazine editors yelling for manuscripts from him, but a couple of the more prominent publishing houses have indicated an interest in bringing out his work between hard covers.

THIS MONTH, as you may have already noticed, nine stories are listed on our contents pages, headed by a man we think you're going to want many more stories from. Also, there are more articles than usual. Opinion on the new type of features we've adopted seems to be sharply divided; so, in an effort to keep everybody happy, we're going to run both, beginning in an early issue. We'll try to pep up the fact articles and still give you plenty of the vignettes of the future.

—HB

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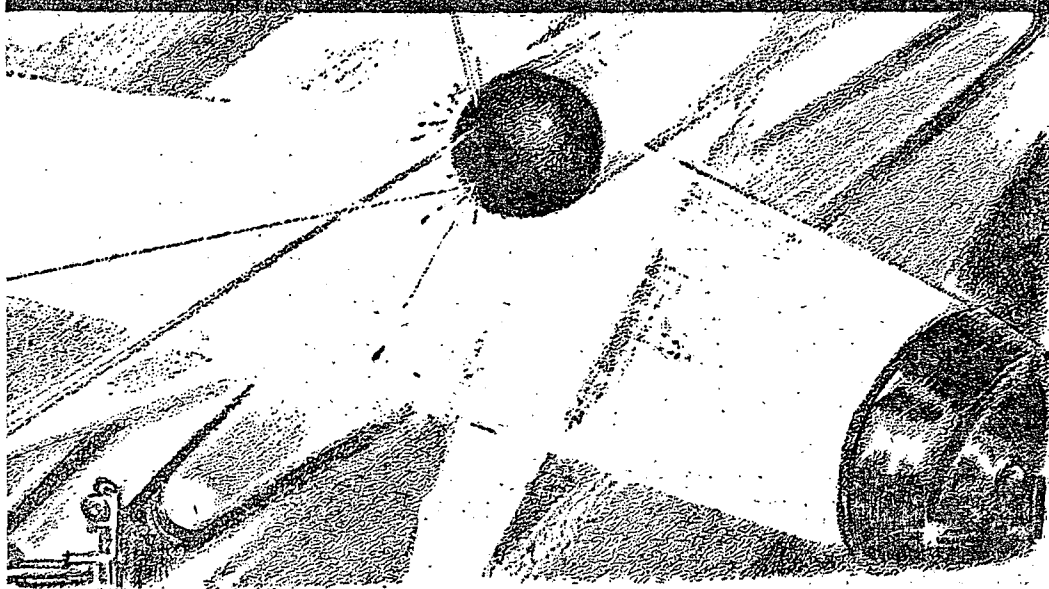
SLAVES of the

Hidden somewhere from the eyes of man was a machine with an evil purpose; yet even its worst enemies protected it



It seemed to January that the globe feared light even more than bullets. But on it came

CRYSTAL BRAIN



By William Carter Sawtelle

"ROUTINE check, sir," January called out as he shoved open the lab door. He didn't knock. In his business and under these circumstances, a knock or any other intimation that he was coming was not only undesirable but was strictly against the rules. Members of the checking staff of the FSB—Federal Security Bureau—came down like the Assyrians of old, as wolves upon the fold, their purpose to count lambs.

Going through the door, he stepped into the brightest lighted laboratory he had ever seen. From the ceiling a whole bank of lights poured down hundreds of watts of electric current transformed into light. Small but powerful flood lights illumined each corner of the room. In addition, floor lamps shed a brilliant luster upward.

The second he saw the lights, he guessed that the man in this lab was

scared of the dark.

It was a new development. He had checked Dr. Atkinson in this lab not two months previously. The lights had not been here then.

"Federal Security, sir," he spoke to the big man crouching over the battered desk in the middle of the littered laboratory. "Routine check. How are you, Dr. Atkinson?" He grinned when he spoke and the grin took a little of the wary alertness off his lean brown face.

"Damn it!" Until January spoke the second time, Atkinson had not realized he had a visitor. He turned a great thatch of white hair and a startled angry face toward the intruder. For an instant, living fear gleamed in his eyes. Then he recognized January. "Oh, it's you, is it? Get to hell out. I'm busy."

January did not move. "Sorry, sir," he said.

Atkinson's face changed. "It is I who should apologize rather than you. You have your duty. I could at least be pleasant about it, since it is for my own protection, but the truth is—I—I was thinking."

"It's quite all right, sir," January answered. His face had lost none of its pleasant good nature. He was accustomed to the way scientists reacted to him. Most of them didn't like the intrusions of the FSB men and plainly said so. The best of them accepted the checkers grudgingly, as just another evil some damned bureaucrat had thought up to hamper the work of honest men. There was nothing personal involved, personally most of them seemed to like this tall lean man whose face never lost its smile—nor its wary alertness—it was just that scientists somehow could not accustom themselves to the idea that they were important enough for anybody to care whether they were alive or not. Their work was important; to a man they thought the particular job each was doing was the most important bit of research ever undertaken on the top side of the earth or planned for the far side of the moon, but they themselves were not important.

JANUARY watched the anger and the irritation and the intrusion go out of the scientist's eyes. But the fear did not go. Casually Atkinson closed his desk drawer. "But I still say you ought to give fair warning that you are coming."

"We can't," the agent answered. "It's like a sentry walking a beat. Anybody who wants to get past the sentry first checks his routing and determines where the sentry will be. Then, when the sentry is somewhere else, the intruder walks past. The FSB doesn't operate according to routine. I am checking you now. I may be back to check you early in the morning. Or

somebody else may be here tomorrow. On the other hand, no agent may visit you for the next month. That way, it will be a little harder for anybody to kidnap you."

"Now who in hell would be kidnapping me?" the scientist asked. A sudden wariness crept into his voice.

January laid his brief-case on the desk and unlocked it. "I don't know. But Preston and Howe are still missing."

Behind the desk, Atkinson was suddenly silent. Evasively silent, January thought. He began to take the equipment out of his brief case.

In February, 1970, James Ward Preston, a prominent physicist, had vanished. The fact that he was even missing had not been known for weeks. By the time it was discovered, the trail had grown cold, any clues that might have been left behind vanished.

One missing scientist might not have caused a furore. He might have suffered an attack of amnesia, any of a dozen things might have happened to him. It was not too important. A month later, it became more important.

William Henry Howe, a brilliant theoretical mathematician, also vanished.

Right then and there the FSB had been created. Its purpose was simple—to check constantly on every important scientist in America, to make certain all were present and accounted for. After all was said and done, the real strength of a nation rested not on its stockpile of atom bombs, not in its steel and coal industries, but in its supply of brains. If two top-flight scientists could disappear and leave behind no trace of what had happened, why couldn't twenty go the same way?

What had happened to Preston and Howe? Nobody knew. If the void had opened and had swallowed them, they could not have vanished more completely.

Was the European Federation kidnapping American scientists? No one who knew the real facts of the world situation ever quite believed this was true but it didn't cost much to send somebody around every week or two to every top-flight scientist to make certain he was still alive and still on the job, whatever his job was.

At first the scientists had been highly indignant, yelling that their personal privacy was being invaded and that the irregular visits of the security men interfered with their work; then their attitude had become one of patient resignation: as you accepted rain and mud, you accepted security men. After all, they didn't take up too much of your valuable time, they just checked your fingerprints to make certain they had the right man, they inquired politely into your health and how you were feeling and had you seen anything suspicious? And it was sort of flattering to know that the government thought you were so important. After you got over being irritated, you were just a little pleased, especially since the FSB men were invariably good people.

"Bosh!" Atkinson said. "Preston and Howe were no more kidnapped that I am likely to be—" He caught himself in midsentence. His gaze came quickly up to January's face, to see if the FSB men had paid any attention to what had been said.

JANUARY, still taking equipment out of his brief-case, seemed not to be listening. As Atkinson stopped speaking, a feeling of cold appeared out of nowhere, charging deep centers of the agent's mind. He thought: this man is afraid of something more definite than the dark. For an instant, he tried to let his mind explore the meaning and the nature of the fear he sensed here, then shrugged the thought aside. This was a routine inspection. It was his job to

determine if the man sitting at the desk was actually William B. Atkinson, Ph. D., and to ask said individual if he had anything to say. That was all there was to it.

January had made hundreds of such inspections and nothing had ever happened yet. Atkinson had been visited dozens of times. Without being asked, the scientist extended his right hand. January took the thumb print on a square of transparent plastic, slipped it into the comparison viewer. As he brought the viewer to his eyes, he was aware that the scientist was watching him with the wariness of a crouching rabbit that suspects the presence of a wolf. A thin film of sweat was visible on Atkinson's forehead.

The prints matched. This man was Atkinson. January took the viewer from his eyes. "I see you have cut your finger," he said. The print had revealed a new scratch on the thumb.

"Yes. Last week." Atkinson obviously did not have his mind on what he was saying. He had picked up a pencil and was making apparently meaningless marks on a piece of paper. "Chunk of glass. Did you catch the scar on the print?"

"Yes." According to the rules, this interview was over. January ought to be leaving. But he hesitated. "Anything you want to say, sir?"

"No." There was hesitation in the voice.

"Has anything that you regard as suspicious happened since the last security agent visited you?"

"N-o." Atkinson looked up from the paper. His hand was shaking. The sweat had spread from his forehead to his whole face. His eyes went round the laboratory, searching, for something, then came back to the paper on his desk. January looked at the paper. Doodles filled the white sheet, hen tracks, a house with smoke coming out of the chimney, trees, a dog. The agent

blinked, looked again to make sure. His gaze froze on the sheet of paper.

Spread through the doodles were the words—*I know what happened to Howe.*

January's eyes jerked up to Atkinson's face. The film of sweat had spread. Globules of yellow perspiration glistened on the scientist's skin. Again his eyes went over the brilliantly lighted laboratory, repeating his endless, wary, frightened search for something that he was afraid might be there, something which could perhaps be kept away by intense light. Atkinson wiped at the sweat. "Hot tonight," he said. "Humidity's bad. Sit down, Mr. January. Too hot to work. What do you think of the Cub's chances of winning the pennant this year?"

January slid into the chair beside the desk. Like a private watchman making his rounds, Atkinson's eyes went over the laboratory again.

"If their pitching holds up, they ought to be in," January said. "That Memmendorff is really some pitcher. Did you see the game he pitched against the Cards last week?"

"No. Couldn't get away, unfortunately. Too busy." Atkinson tried to grin. The effort failed. He opened the top drawer of his desk an inch, glanced at something inside.

HIS PULSES jumping, January watched. In his day, he had seen a lot of frightened men, criminals fresh caught with the fear of the law still a living yellow color on their faces, men walking toward the death house, knowing what waited for them beyond the green door, men fatally injured in auto and helicopter accidents, knowing what had happened to them and trying to face fearlessly the last final fearful act of every man, dying itself. He had seen the crash of Rocket II, the second passenger-carrying rocket to try for the moon. Forty miles up, something

had gone wrong with the ship's steering equipment. Rocket II had turned in a circle and at full speed had dived nose first into the Chaco Desert, the fuel tanks blowing when the ship hit. The remains had not been fear-inspiring in themselves, not enough had been left to make even a bad smell, but January, inspecting those remains, had had no trouble in imagining the feelings of the poor devils who had ridden the ship down.

It struck January that Atkinson was nearly the most frightened man he had ever seen. Scientists usually had an odd lot of fear complexes. The evils that most men feared, depression, loss of job, loss of health, even death itself, did not seem to impress most scientists as cause for fear. These evils, these dangers, they ignored. But they were afraid just the same, down to the last man they were afraid—of the facts and of the possibilities that their science was opening up for them, of the awesome depths of nature they were exploring.

For centuries past the counting the human race had been exploring nature. Primitive magic has been an attempt to explore and to control the strong, vital forces that men felt were in existence around them. Unless there was more truth than had ever been revealed, sorcery and magic had not been adequate exploratory or control tools. Science was a much better tool. Maybe it was too good.

As they used this tool to explore the universe, the scientists seemed to act as if the things they saw with their microscopes and their telescopes frightened them. Always January had had the impression that the scientists were wondering about some mysterious entity that existed just beyond the range of the biggest telescope, the best electron microscope, some vast, hidden, primal *something* for which they had no name but which they were afraid

they would someday rouse to wakefulness, with disastrous results, much as a hunter rouses a hibernating bear—and wishes to hell he had left the monster sound asleep.

Perhaps something that would sweep the human race from existence, that would take over this green planet, something against which man and the science of man could not compete!

This the scientists seemed to fear!

From the desk drawer, Atkinson cautiously took a small cardboard box. Sticking through a slit in the top of the box was what looked like a crude, hand-made finger ring, set with a small red stone which was dull and lifeless. Atkinson lifted the pencil again. Mixed among the doodles were the words:

"If that stone begins to glow, talk about baseball."

January nodded. In the back of his mind was the thought, had this man gone insane? The idea received support when the scientist got up and moved across the lab, switching on additional lights, making the brightness almost intolerable.

"It doesn't like light, that I know," Atkinson spoke, his voice a whisper. "Maybe light will protect us. Maybe. Some vibratory frequency will protect us. But which frequency?" He seemed to muse over a long-considered problem.

"Protect us from what?" January spoke.

"I think it's all right to talk, but it is safest to whisper," Atkinson answered. "From a *penth*."

"What?"

ATKINSON seemed not to hear him. Again the man was staring around the laboratory, again he was listening. Sweat was making tiny rivulets down his face. January felt the creep of cold. Atkinson slipped back into the chair at his desk. "I

have seen Howe," he whispered.

"You have seen Howe?" January repeated the words carefully.

"Yes. But Michaelson made the original discovery, January. You know who he is. Or you can find out. Michaelson is your starting point—" He broke off. His gaze came to rest on the ring sitting on the desk in front of him.

Like a warning light in the fog, the stone in the setting had begun to glow blood-red.

Coming from nowhere and from everywhere, from the walls, from the ceiling, from the floors, from the very air itself, was a thin weird mechanical voice.

"At-kin-son. At-kin-son."

A strangled cry forming in his throat, the scientist leaped to his feet. His eyes darted around the room, came to rest on a spot directly above his head. January followed the line of the scientist's gaze. His first dazed impression was that his eyes were deceiving him.

Up near the ceiling, where the lights poured in a brilliant flood, a shadow was forming.

Where no shadow could possibly exist, a shadow was coming into existence.

It was growing larger. In the split second while January watched, the shadow swirled with increasing blackness, and became a blob of darkness the size of a doubled fist.

It was the blackest thing January had ever seen. Beside it, ebony was a shade of gray. In comparison to this total darkness, the heart of midnight was like the bright light of a summer afternoon. Where the human eye, registering the absence of all light, calls an object black, the blackness of this thing was not only the absence of light, it was the absence of anything.

Where nothing exists there is no light.

This thing was nothing.

In an instant it had formed and had enlarged to the size of a toy balloon. As Atkinson, dry husky croaks sounding in his throat, jerked open the door of his desk and pawed frantically for something in there, it began to move toward him, moving sluggishly as if it did not relish the blaze of light in this room, or was somehow impeded by the existence of the light, but moving just the same.

The laboratory echoed to the roar of thunder as the FSB agent snatched the gun holstered under his left shoulder and pulled the trigger. January was hardly conscious of his action. Intuitively as he recognized the blob of darkness as a source of danger subconscious reflex actions took care of pulling the gun.

The bullets struck the target. He could not see them strike it but he could see a swirl in the blob of darkness each time he pulled the trigger.

The bullets did not go through the ball, they did not strike the ceiling above. They also had no effect whatsoever on the ball of darkness, did not in the least slow its progress.

January stared at the gun in his hand. It was a compact but very powerful weapon. It would literally stop the charge of an elephant. But it did not stop the advance of this thing.

"At-kin-son. At-kin-son." Again the shrill whisper sounded in the room. There was a mechanical note about the voice, each syllable was carefully pronounced, there was absolutely no accent.

"Damn you!" The scientist snatched something from his desk. It was a little weapon of some kind. He pointed the weapon upward. From it jutted a beam of light.

January flinched involuntarily. The light was so bright as to be blinding, to hurt the eyes. Atkinson had taken refuge in a brightly lighted laboratory.

Now he was trying to use a weapon of light.

From between slitted lids, the FSB agent saw the light beam hit the ball of blackness. Bullets had not stopped it.

Nor did the beam of light. It rolled to one side, dodging the light, and kept coming.

"Run, January," Atkinson yelled. "This is a *penth*!"

FEAR IN shocking waves of biting cold rolled over the FSB agent but he did not run. Men who worked for the FSB were selected with the idea in mind that they would not run. Every impulse in Joe January shrieked to him to run. He moved forward.

"Stay away from me!" Atkinson shouted. Simultaneously the light from the weapon began to falter. The *penth* moved rapidly forward.

Atkinson must have known then how the struggle was going to end. "Check on Michaelson, January." So far he got. But no farther. The *penth* touched his arm. He screamed.

Where it touched his arm, the arm vanished. From his right hand, the light weapon dropped to the top of the desk, slid from the desk to the floor.

Atkinson turned a tortured face toward January. "*Penth* from the Crystal Brain—" The *penth* flowed up his left arm. He tried to shake it off, it clung like a leech. As it moved upward, nothing was left behind it. It rolled over his shoulder. He screamed then, for the last time. The blackness folded over his head. Like a river of ink running downhill, it flowed over his body.

Nothing was left behind it.

It raced downward to the floor. For an instant, to January's horror-struck eyes, it seemed to linger an inch or two above the floor. As it hung there, a whisper of distant laughter seemed to echo through the room.

Then it vanished.

As it disappeared, the tiny red jewel in the setting of the ring on the desk ceased to glow.

Where a man had stood a minute before, now there was nothing.

Waves of living cold washed over the body of Joe January. He felt his hair rise. Every impulse in his body shrieked to him to run—somewhere, anywhere, it didn't matter where, just so he got away from this place. His lips moved, forming words.

"Atkinson. Atkinson...." he whispered.

There was no answer. He knew there wouldn't be. With his own eyes, he had seen Atkinson vanish, he had watched the scientist go away as no other mortal had ever gone before, so far as he knew.

So far as he knew!

Preston and Howe had gone. Atkinson had said that he knew what had happened to Howe. Had Preston and Howe gone the same way Atkinson had gone, like rabbits disappearing down the gullet of a snake? At the thought, the agent felt his skin creep.

What was this thing that Atkinson had called a *penth* and which had come out of nowhere to devour him? Was devour the word to describe what had happened? January had had the impression that the *penth* was feeding, though perhaps he had been mistaken in that. Perhaps some other process was in action. His sense impressions told him that Atkinson had been devoured but in the state of shock in which he knew himself to be, his sense impressions were not trustworthy.

He concentrated every effort of his will on one simple task, reaching into the pocket of his coat for a package of cigarettes. He had to try three times before he could get a cigarette out of the package. Then he broke it. He got the second one to his lips and bit into it as if it were a cigar.

"God damn you, Joe January, get control of yourself!"

He spat out crumbs of tobacco and pieces of paper. The next cigarette was accepted by his lips. He broke two matches before he got one lit, then the third match went out before he could get it to the cigarette. Again he cursed himself. The next time he tried, he succeeded in lighting the cigarette.

In this one fact, he knew he had achieved a major psychic victory. He had himself under control.

Without moving from the spot where he stood, he reached out a hand for the phone on Atkinson's desk. The number he dialed was not in any phone book. It was a direct long-distance connection. Even he did not know where the phone he was calling was located—it might be in Toledo, St. Louis, here in Chicago—but the person who answered it would consider the call an emergency and would relay instantly to the chief of the FSB every word January reported.

Before he had finished dialing, the stone setting on the ring had begun to glow.

He looked at it, somberly, considering the various things this one fact could mean.

No matter what it meant, he knew he didn't like it. Very cautiously and carefully, he replaced the phone and looked around the laboratory for whatever was to be seen there.

CHAPTER II

WORKING LATE, the girl was busy transcribing letters. The other five girls in the office had gone home but she had volunteered to remain and finish up all dictation for the day. It was nothing unusual for her to do this. Of all the employees of Giles Lorton, Inc., Nancy Howard was the most faithful and the most willing worker. Since she had come to work in

this office three months before, she had not been late a single time and she had not missed a day.

Her fingers flew over the keys of the electric typewriter as she took Mr. Lorton's dictation from the wire recording. The switch that controlled the operation of the recorder was located under her desk, where the pressure of her toe could turn it on or off. She was a competent, but not expert, typist; consequently there were frequent mis-hit keys or strike-overs, necessitating the use of an eraser. But each misspelled word and each typographical error was carefully, competently, and completely erased and corrected and the letters were perfect before she took them in to Mr. Lorton for his signature. If the recording was not clear, she ran the wire over and over again until the doubtful word was certain, listening to the voice in the earphones with her head cocked to one side like some perplexed and slightly puzzled wren.

In fact, she wasn't much bigger than a wren, but she was very well developed. Nancy Howard was an NPN girl. NPN—No Padding Necessary.

The building in which she worked was located on Michigan Avenue, Chicago 1, Illinois. You entered this building through one of many solid glass doors set in polished aluminum that looked like platinum and probably cost almost as much, and you found yourself in a marble-floored foyer big enough to contain a working fountain and a statue of cupid, with room enough left over for a platoon to practice all the marching formations they could learn on a parade ground. It was quite an impressive foyer. Banks of almost noiseless elevators whisked people upward and out of sight into mysterious upper regions. There was even a private elevator, but you had to have a special key to enter and operate it. If you had such a key, you could get into this elevator and punch

a button and zoom straight up to the roof, where the cage, with a discrete whoosh, would deposit you in the elaborate private offices of the man who owned the building.

It was quite an impressive building. Just looking at it, you thought instantly of respectability and refinement. Nothing illegal could ever occur in this building, nothing immoral could happen here, nothing wrong could take place in these sacred premises.

Mr. Lorton would not tolerate any of these things in this place.

Mr. Lorton owned the building.

In his way, Mr. Lorton was one of the big shots in Chicago. Over on La-Salle street, they regarded him as a financial wizard. His deals always came out right. If he bought a stock, that stock went up. If he sold a stock, that stock was due to take a nose dive. He worked the same way in the grain market.

Yet, oddly, not much was really known about him. He had been in Chicago less than two years. No one knew where he had come from, he never spoke of his past, apparently he had not been rich when he first arrived in town. But he was rich now. That much was certain. Wise people, hoping to make a profit from a deal with him, did not inquire into the sources of his wealth. It was enough to say that he was a financial wizard who had gotten rich in the market. There was no point in asking questions about Giles Lorton, the man, where he had been born, where he had gone to school, if he had gone to school—and his speech sometimes indicated a lack of formal education, who his parents were, had one of his ancestors come over on the Mayflower, etc. Giles Lorton, the man, nobody knew. Nobody really cared much. He was rich. So what? Chicago, having seen more millionaires that it can remember, is not inclined to pay too much attention to the breed. Wealth

alone is not enough to distinguish any man. Giles Lorton was wealthy but he was otherwise undistinguished—carefully so. Or at least so far as the world in general knew.

Of the people who knew him, perhaps Nancy Howard knew the most about him. Some of her information she had gathered from his dictation—innocuous stuff, strictly, about contracts and agreements and leases and buying and selling and taxes, but still personal enough to reveal something about the man. The majority of her information, however, she had gotten in a way that would have surprised the hell out of him, if he had known about it.

CONCEALED IN the desk of his private office was a miniature radio transmitter. A tiny thing hardly bigger than a thimble, it represented the ultimate in radio design possible to the advanced technology of the year 1972. Developments during World War II, in which a complete radar set had been mounted in the nose of a .90 millimeter shell, resulting in the famous proximity fuse, had paved the way for this thimble-size transmitter. The range of the transmitter in Lorton's private office was not over fifty feet—the hf radiations damped out rapidly—but even this short range was entirely adequate to activate the equally tiny receiver hidden inside the transcriber. Concealed wires ran up the transcriber tubes to a miniature earphone hidden inside the left ear plug.

While transcribing dictation, she could also listen to every sound from Lorton's office. If a word was spoken behind those thick oak doors inscribed with the name Mr. Lorton, in those sound-proofed premises, it was instantly transmitted to her in the outer office. True, if the transcriber was in operation she also heard the words coming from it, with the result that

she could not distinguish between the two, but to correct this deficiency all she had to do was to touch the transcriber cut-off button with her toe, after which the words from the radio came through clear and undistorted.

Of course, while she was listening to the radio, it was wise to be correcting a typographical error at the same time or to pretend to be trying to distinguish a not quite clear word from the transcriber. Anyone watching her would reach the obvious conclusion that she was merely an inexperienced typist having trouble with her transcribing, which was true.

She *was* an inexperienced typist.

As to what she was in addition to being a not quite perfect stenographer, this was her secret, and one that she fervidly hoped she would be able to keep as long as was necessary.

As to why she was listening to everything that happened in Mr. Lorton's office, this was also her secret.

Usually Mr. Lorton was in his office from seven until nine each evening. He was not much in evidence during the day and no one knew or cared where he went after he left at nine but he spent two hours in his private sanctum almost every day.

While he was in his office, he talked to someone.

Nancy Howard did not know who he talked to. It was not a telephone conversation, the telephone switchboard she handled after office hours, it was not a visitor who came in through the regular entrance from the private elevator. There was a second entrance and exit to Mr. Lorton's office, through a door which opened into a corridor served by one of the regular elevators, but Nancy did not think that Mr. Lorton's visitor came this way. She did not think he even had a visitor, she thought he was talking to someone who was somewhere else.

As to how that conversation was

transmitted, she did not know. There was no permanent private radio installation in his office, she had searched carefully before she had hidden her own tiny transmitter in his desk. The only conclusion she could reach was that he carried with him a miniature radio transmitter and receiver of his own. This solution was possible. She thought it was probable.

This left unanswered, however, the question of the identity of the person with whom he carried on his private talks.

It was the answer to this question that made her sit on the edge of her chair with her head cocked to one side like a puzzled and badly frightened wren trying to decide if that long straight object in the grass is a stick or a snake.

She didn't think he talked to a person.

She thought he talked to a *thing*.

FOR ALL SHE knew, he might not be talking over a radio transmitter at all. No transmitter might be needed. The *thing* might be right there in the office with him. They might be talking face to face, one on each side of the acres-wide mahogany desk. The thing might be sitting on the desk itself. When Lorton left the office, the *thing* might go with him, invisible and unseen by anybody else.

Two facts were certain. The thing reported information to him, often seemingly describing events that were taking place miles away. It also took orders from him.

She had heard him issue those orders more than once, in a crisp commanding tone of voice, such orders as: "Report on Number 71."

After a few seconds of silence back would come the answer, in a clicking, metallic, mechanical voice: "Num-ber sev-en one is tak-ing a bath, sir." Or the answer might be that Number 71

was working in the laboratory, or was taking a ride along the Outer Drive, drinking coffee, fighting with his wife, was out with a woman, anything.

Always the report was by number, never by name. She had never heard a name mentioned. A name was one thing she wanted. A name would give her a starting point.

She could not investigate Number 71 or Number 28 or any other number until she knew the name that went along with the number.

Sitting in his office, Lorton could seemingly find out what any of almost a hundred people were doing. He could also tell these people to stop what they were doing or to do something else. They seemed to obey him. From this fact, she had the grim suspicion that he had some way of seeing that his orders were carried out.

She did not know how he gained control of the people who obeyed him or how he forced them to carry out his commands. There were a million things she did not know, it seemed to her, but one fact was crystal clear to her—that she was playing a dangerous and a deadly game. If Lorton ever discovered who she was or that she was spying on him—the very thought sent a wave of terror through her.

But, whatever the risk, she knew she was going to take it.

In her left earphone the whistle that preceded the mechanical voice sounded.

With her toe, she kicked off the transcriber and bent to erase a non-existent typographical error.

"What is it?" Lorton's voice came.

"Num-ber ni-ne had just been contacted by an F S B man."

Nancy Howard did not know what the FSB was or even that it existed. Few people did. An essential part of the function of the FSB was to stay out of sight and out of knowledge. Apparently Lorton was one of the few

people who did know. She heard him growl a curse.

"Those nosey meddlers."

"Yes, sir."

There was a moment of silence. She had never heard Number 9 mentioned before. Apparently Lorton had forgotten his identity. "Who is Number nine? I seem to have forgotten."

Bent over her typewriter, Nancy Howard held her breath.

"At-kin-son," the mechanical voice came. "William B. At-kin-son. P H D. Res-i-dence—"

"Okay, I recall him now. The physicist. Put it on."

OFTEN Nancy Howard had heard the words, "Put it on," without knowing what they meant. She had no idea what was happening behind the closed doors of the private office. Far-way voices sounded, indistinct voices. She caught a flutter of words. "—Now who in the hell—kidnap me?"

Kidnapping! Like an electric shock, the word jolted through her mind. She strained her ears, trying to hear the answer. It came. Something about Preston and Howe, she couldn't tell what. Her heart climbed up in her throat. Her breath came faster. The receiver crackled in her ear. Words were coming through, but she couldn't tell what they were. In his office, Lorton said nothing. The mechanical voice was still.

She erased one word, then another. Very carefully, she typed them in again, then made a face as if she had made another mistake. Again she picked up the eraser.

"What do you think?" Lorton spoke.

"That At-kin-son will talk," the mechanical voice answered.

"Damn!" Lorton said.

"Yes, sir. What are your or-ders, sir?"

Silence came from the office. Nancy held her breath. Tinny voices rattled

far away, she could not tell what they were saying. Lorton was silent.

"Or-ders, sir?" the mechanical voice repeated.

"Watch them. If Atkinson—if Number nine talks, erase him."

"Very well." In the mechanical answer, she caught a hint of satisfaction, of pleasure, as if somewhere, some thing relished this order. "In the pres-ence of the F S B man, sir?"

"Yes, if that is necessary to keep him from talking."

"But the F S B man will see what hap-pens."

"Let him! A whole hell of a lot of good it will do him."

"Very well, sir."

Silence again. Nancy tried to type. The errors were real now. Her fingers hit the wrong keys, her thumb found the space bar at the wrong time. She started the final letter all over again, made too many honest mistakes, and had to retype it. Vaguely there sounded in her earphone, faint popping sounds, something like the noise of a pistol exploding far away. There was one thin wail that she thought was someone screaming, then silence again.

"It is finish-ed, sir," the mechanical voice said.

"Good. Carry on," Lorton answered.

A soft click sounded in her ear-phones. She knew what the click meant, that she would hear nothing more at this time. She bent furiously to her typing.

In her mind was no understanding of what she had heard. But one point was clear. At last she had a name. William B. Atkinson. If she could find him, she could find a man who might be able to help her.

A whisper of sound came from behind her. She turned. Giles Lorton stood in the door of his private office.

He was a short man, of a stocky

build, with a round impassive face. His eyes were deep-set and they looked furtively out at the world from behind bushy eye-brows. Every time she saw him, she had the impression of some beast of the jungle peering out through a fringe of thorny foliage at the world beyond the edge of the green tangle which was its home.

Lorton was well dressed. The best tailors made his suits, his shirts were hand-made, his ties hand painted. A diamond ring glittered on his right hand, on his left wrist was a thick-cased diamond studded wrist watch. The best of everything, this he had. Power, and the knowledge of it, flowed out from him like a tangible electric force.

A little cry sounded in her throat at the sight of him.

He stood there in the doorway somberly regarding her.

CHAPTER III

LIKE A mounting, mushrooming atomic explosion, fear rose in his brain. The impulse in him was to run. He fought it. His gaze went around the laboratory. If a ball of swirling blackness was forming there, he could not see it. Lights bright enough for taking motion pictures spat at him like angry cats. Atkinson had had the impression that there was safety in light. It had been a mistaken impression. He had even tried to use a light weapon. Though the weapon had failed, January remembered that the ball of darkness had tried to twist away from it. This was a fact worth remembering. The light weapon had not stopped the *penth* but the creature had slowed when confronted with that intense beam of brilliant illumination.

There was nothing in the lab that he could see.

The setting in the ring had ceased to glow.

Had something, partially evoked when he picked up the telephone, gone back into nothingness when he replaced the headset on its cradle? He did not know. *Was his mind being read?* Had his intention to call FSB headquarters and report what had happened here been deduced from the fact that he had picked up the telephone or had something slipped inside his mind and read the intention there?

He did not know which it was or that either solution was true. He did not know—anything!

There was one way he could find out. If you dialed GARfield 0001-2 you got the time. Surely no one could object to him knowing the correct time. He reached for the phone.

The glow appeared in the ring.

Hastily he took his hand away from the phone.

The glow died in the stone.

Then his mind wasn't being read. His intentions were being deduced from his actions. He felt a little better at the thought that his hidden mental world was safe. He could think in safety. But not much better as he realized that even if his mind wasn't being read he was being watched.

Something here in this lab was watching him. Something saw him pick up the telephone. Something got ready to act each time he tried to talk. Something didn't want him to make a report.

At the other end of this telephone, at the other end of any telephone, was help. When his report went through, top-flight minds would be called into consultation. The entire resources of the FSB would be at his disposal. Agents would fly into Chicago, they would come in by train and bus. Very quietly the local and state police would be notified, their assistance asked and received. A cordon could be thrown around and through the city until no

alley cat could pounce on a rat without the action being noted.

All this if he could use the phone.

The catch was—he couldn't use it.

He had no wish to join Atkinson. If he tried to use the phone, he did not in the least doubt that he would find himself joining that vanished scientist.

What to do?

Carefully he picked up the ring from the desk top. He picked up his brief-case. From the floor under the desk where it had fallen he scooped up the tiny weapon that Atkinson had used, slipped it in his pocket.

He went quietly out the door.

THE SECOND the door closed behind him, he began to run. No fleet-footed halfback sprinting through a broken field, with a touchdown, a Bowl game, and a professional contract waiting for him when he crossed the goal line, ever did a better job of zigging and zagging, of ducking and dodging, than did Joe January on this occasion. He didn't know he was being followed, he didn't know he wasn't, he just knew there was a chance that he was being pursued. He didn't know whether he could outrun his pursuer or whether he couldn't, he just knew he had to try. He ducked down an alley, he cut across a vacant lot, at imminent risk of his life he ducked across a street humming with traffic. Parked at the curb, he saw a vacant cab. He jumped into the back-seat. "Downtown, as fast as you can make it."

The driver grinned at him. "What-samatter, did her old man come home unexpectedly?"

"I'll say he did! Get this crate in gear and get moving."

He sank back on the cushions of the cab, panting and exhausted, but alive.

Being alive was more than he had really expected.

The driver took the Outer Drive to the Loop. Traffic swirled around the cab, long, sleek cars gleaming with chromium and stainless steel slid past on the river of black asphalt. January slipped Atkinson's ring on his finger. The red stone remained dull and lifeless.

He took a deep breath that was close to pure relief so great in its intensity as to be almost pathological and fumbled in his pockets for his cigarettes.

In the Loop, he had the driver drop him. Crowds thronged through these streets. January joined them. It felt good to bump elbows with people, it felt good to be pushed and shoved, it felt good to look at lighted show windows. There was comfort in a crowd. People everywhere around him. The deep, dark, and desperate fear that crouched shivering in the corner of his mind began to go away. What did it matter if out there in suburban Chicago a private laboratory stood lonely and empty, its bright lights glaring defiance at something that lurked in corners? Down here in this milling throng, he could forget all about that laboratory. It didn't matter to any of these people here. What did it matter to him?

He was kidding himself and he knew it. That lab did matter to him. Although they didn't know it, it mattered to these people here on these streets. Maybe it mattered as much as living or not living. Maybe it mattered as much as the difference between freedom and slavery. Maybe—

A drug store caught his eye. He went in.

"A private phone booth? At the rear, sir," the girl in the cashier's cage told him.

He dialed the long distance num-

ber, the phone clicked and hummed, a voice said: "Yes."

He was through to help!

"Wire this."

"Right. Shoot."

"To: Chief, FBS, From: January, Chicago. Priority: Top. Subject: Routine check of William B. Atkinson..."

So far he got. But no farther. There was a slight delay, as if something had lost him momentarily. But only for a moment. Then the stone in the ring began to glow again.

"Waiting for the message," the voice spoke from the other end of the wire.

His eye on the glowing stone, Joe January spoke: "No message." And hung up.

Reluctantly, as if something hated to let go, the glow died in the ring.

Joe January wiped spurting sweat from his face and stepped out of the phone booth.

IN SELECTING its personnel, the Federal Security Bureau had had access to all governmental data on this subject, together with the testing techniques that had been developed since the days of the Alpha test of World War I. In choosing the men to work for it, the Bureau had set up tests that automatically excluded from employment all except exceedingly tough-minded, clear-thinking, hard-boiled skeptics who believed nothing that they heard, nothing that they read, and little that they saw with their own eyes. Even more than these qualities, men were selected for mental balance, poise, the ability to light on their mental feet in most situations and to stay there. Men with minds like the physical balance of a cat, these were what the Bureau wanted.

When he came out of this phone booth, with sweat spurting from him, Joe January needed all the mental

balance the Bureau testing technicians thought he had, needed it just to stay sane.

He had been followed, he was being followed now, he could not see or otherwise detect the thing that followed him. If there had been a touch of paranoia anywhere in his mind, this situation would have triggered it into explosive violence. He would have run shrieking from the drug store, he would have dived headlong and screaming into the throngs outside, the police would have gathered him in, strong sedation, possibly a straight-jacket would have been needed to force him to be quiet.

Days, possibly weeks later, fingerprints would have revealed his identity, hastily the Bureau would have sent men to investigate him, doctors to treat him. Probably the medicos would have decided they were trying to treat a mind hopelessly insane. The end would have been some institution, some asylum devoted to the care of the mentally sick. Under proper treatment, he might possibly have recovered, given time, but the treatment would have been lengthy and difficult.

This, if he had been anything except what he was. But he was Joe January. He ran into a booth and almost knocked down a man in a gray suit, getting a glare from a pair of hot brown eyes in return, and stumbled out into the street, scared half to death but with the thought in his mind that possibly the purpose of this whole maneuver *was* to drive him insane. That thought, plus what he was, saved him. If something was trying to drive him nuts, well, let it! In that challenge, like an agile cat being dropped, he twisted himself around as he fell and kept his mental balance.

He didn't laugh. He couldn't. But

he did light a cigarette with only one match.

He thought: "The problem is how to communicate what I know to the Bureau and stay alive while I'm doing it."

It was not a little problem.

First, perhaps, was to make an attempt to locate the thing that followed him. He suspected it was a ball of darkness similar to what Atkinson had called a *penth*. It did not seem reasonable to assume that a human could have shadowed him from the laboratory. But something had. Ergo, it was a *penth*, what the hell ever that was.

STANDING ON the sidewalk, with people brushing past him on both sides, he tried to locate it. On both sides of the street, buildings climbed up into the sky. Office buildings, with most of the windows dark, a few lighted ones marking the spot where some unfortunate clerk had to work overtime, or where some department head had cajoled a stenographer into staying late to take a little lap dictation. Overhead in the sky the lights of helicopters moved like little planets in the night.

So far as he could tell, he was unobserved, but as he turned his head from side to side, he got the impression that a thin shadow stayed always just out of the range of his sight. He jerked around quickly, trying to catch sight of it before it could move.

It was faster than he was, it moved quicker than he could.

To hell with it, then! If it was there, it was there. Presumably he could do nothing about it. Obviously it knew that he was aware of it. Or something back of it knew of his awareness. His flight from the lab, the fact that he had stopped using the phone on two occasions, must have revealed his knowledge of its presence.

The next step was to find out what

limits it placed on his actions. It did not permit him to use the phone. This much was certain. What else would it stop him from doing?

Down the street a sign said: *GRANT HOTEL*.

He had registered at this hotel this afternoon, but until this moment he had forgotten this fact. At the sight of the sign, he walked straight to the hotel, entered the lobby, and went directly to a writing desk.

He had hardly got the sheet of paper on the writing desk and the pen in his hand before the ring began to glow.

Letters were out.

A telegram? He doubted it but it was worth trying. There was a telegraph desk in the corner of the lobby. He went over to it, picked up a message blank and a pencil, groaned, dropped the pad of blanks back on the counter.

"Change your mind?" the girl behind the counter asked.

"Yeah. I think I'll write a letter instead. It's cheaper."

"Our special night letter rates are very reasonable, sir."

"Thanks. I guess not." Still he hesitated at the counter. The ring had glowed when he picked up the pencil and the pad, but had gone out when he laid them down. Apparently talk was not verboten. Or did that depend on what he said and to whom he said it? He eyed the girl behind the desk. She had platinum hair and false eyelashes. Her nails were done in scarlet and her blouse puffed out in the places where a blouse ought to puff out.

To his mind, she looked like a girl who didn't intend to spend all her life behind the counter of a telegraph office. Her plans included better things.

"What time you get off, honey?" January said.

"What?" Her eyes flashed over him, appraising him with all the expertness of a girl looking for a man whose bankroll matched her aspirations. "When I get off, I'm busy," she said. Picking up a pad of messages, she began to read them.

JANUARY moved away from the counter. Even if talk was not forbidden, he did not relish the thought of trying to tell this peroxide creature that he was a member of the FSB, that he had seen a ball of blackness gobble up a prominent scientist, that he couldn't report this information to his headquarters without being gobbled up himself, and would she please report it for him?

Why wasn't talking forbidden too? For that matter, why didn't the ring glow all the time? The *penth* was always there, watching him. Why didn't the ring reveal its presence?

He decided that as long as the *penth* just watched him, it remained invisible—and harmless. In this invisible condition the ring did not detect it. Apparently in order to harm him, the *penth* had to become visible. As it started to become visible, the ring detected its presence, probably by means of powerful electromagnetic radiations the *penth* emitted in the process of materialization.

The explanation made sense. For all he knew, it might even be true. What was a *penth*? Atkinson had said that somebody by the name of Michaelson had discovered, invented, created, knew about, or was in some manner responsible for the existence of that blob of darkness. Who was Michaelson?

The name woke lingering echoes in his mind. He had known, or heard of, a man by that name, but at the moment, he couldn't recall who Michaelson was. Some scientist, he thought,

but what kind of a scientist or where he lived, January could not recall.

Why was he allowed to talk?

There was only one answer he could see. It was an answer that did not please him at all but one that could be easily checked. Outside the hotel, he looked up and down the street. A blue-coated figure was loafing at the corner. January moved straight toward the cop.

"Officer—" As he spoke, the ring began to glow.

"What is it?" the cop inquired.

"Nothing," he answered. "I had a question, but I just remembered the answer myself." Turning, he walked away. He saw now why he was allowed to talk. He could talk to the girl in the telegraph office, he could probably try to talk to anybody on the street. They wouldn't believe him, probably they would think he was drunk. But the minute he tried to talk to someone in authority, the *penth* was on the job.

Probably the cop on the corner would not understand him either, but the cop would almost automatically arrest him and book him to be held for observation and questioning. There his identity would be revealed, a report would go forward through routine channels to the FSB, and someone would immediately call who would at least try to understand him.

Hence—no talk to cops.

He had information that was of vital importance, but he couldn't communicate it. He was under embargo, under interdict, excommunicated from contact with his fellows.

Which brought him full circle back to his original problem. Somehow he had to duck that *penth*, and get lost.

The question was—how?

In the busy streets of Chicago's Loop a man was shadowed by a shadow.

"A drink is what you need, January," he thought. He moved toward a saloon. He hardly noticed the man in the gray suit fall into step beside him. In this crowd, anybody going in your direction was likely to seem to be walking beside you.

"Turn right at the next corner," the man in the gray suit spoke.

"What?"

"And keep walking," Gray Suit answered. January recognized him as the man he had bumped into in the drug store.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Keep walking and don't argue," Gray Suit said.

January kept walking. Automatically his lips straightened into a knife-edge line. He measured Gray Suit for heft and build, deciding exactly where he would hit him first and how hard. The fellow didn't look too tough.

The FSB man had already concluded he could take Gray Suit when he realized that the man in the brown suit on his left was also keeping pace with him, walking in step with him in fact. Gray Suit wasn't alone. He had Brown Suit with him.

Glancing over his shoulder, January caught a glimpse of a hard face following right behind him. Blue Suit!

The three men almost surrounding him, they reached the corner.

"Turn right," Gray Suit said, an edge to his voice.

Joe January turned right.

CHAPTER IV

LORTON moved quietly across the office and stood looking down at Nancy Howard. A hint of amusement lurked deep in his eyes but his face was sombre.

"Working late?"

"Yes. There were some letters that

had to be finished. I was going to bring them in for your signature." She felt her voice flutter.

"You seem to work late rather often."

"Oh, I don't mind." Had he gotten suspicious of her? She tried to smile, a failing effort, for in her heart there was fear of this man. "Would—would you like me to take some dictation for you?"

"I—" He really hadn't heard what she had said. His mind was elsewhere. He looked at the letter she was typing, then at the copy she had taken from her typewriter and had laid aside, intending to destroy it later.

"You seem to make a great many mistakes."

"I'm sorry. I guess I'm not very good at typing yet. But I'm trying hard to learn."

"Ah."

He stood looking down at her. His hand moved. Her first startled thought was that he was trying to touch her. She squealed, jumped back. But his hand was not moving toward the area where no padding was necessary. He grabbed the cords of the earphones, jerked the headset from her.

She shrank back in the chair.

Swiftly, efficiently, he inspected the earphones. Her heart climbed all the way up into her mouth. Was the speaker in the left earphone well enough hidden to pass inspection?

He missed it.

She breathed easier.

Then he took the plastic cords in both hands and snapped them. Nancy Howard stopped breathing. The cords were plastic tubes designed to conduct sound. When he broke them the tiny wires running up to the hidden speaker were revealed.

They stood out as two tiny strands of wire as fine as human hair.

"Ah," Lorton said.

His fingers moved instantly to the transcriber, following the wires. If he followed them far enough—and she had no doubt he would—he would inevitably find the hidden radio receiver. That in turn would lead him to—

Slipping out of the chair, Nancy Howard started running toward the door.

HE REACHED out a long arm and caught her, jerked her back. She tried to break free but he held her easily. Paying no more attention to her than if she did not exist, he picked up the transcriber with his other hand, threw it to the floor. It did not break. He kicked it open.

Revealed was the thimble-sized radio hidden there.

"Well," he said. His eyes came to her. For the first time since she had come to work in the office, she had his complete attention. From the tips of her trim shoes to the bottom of her brown hair, his eyes went over her, not missing a thing.

"I don't seem to recall your name. Nancy something, isn't it?"

"Let me go. I haven't done anything wrong." She tried to pull away. He held her easily.

"That's to be decided. Will you come into my office, please?"

"No."

He didn't argue. He just picked her up and carried her, kicking heels and all, over his shoulder. Inside he slammed shut the door and she heard a lock click. Then he carried her over to the over-stuffed leather chair and dropped her.

She began to scream.

He shrugged. "Yell your head off. Nobody will hear you. First—"

His fingers explored her body. If she had hidden a pistol or a knife or

even a long pin anywhere in her clothes, his exploration would have revealed it. She tried to resist, discovered that resistance was useless, and quit trying.

"No weapon," he said. "Next—" He forgot her again. She came to her feet, tried to straighten out her disarranged clothes, and headed again for the door. He didn't even look up.

The door was locked. The knob rattled in her hand but would not turn. Lorton paid no attention to her. She moved quickly toward the windows, intending to open them and scream out into the Chicago night.

The windows were sealed permanently, the plastic panes were almost an inch thick.

"Don't try to jump through one of them," Lorton said. "You'll only get a nasty bump."

She moved toward the telephone.

That got his attention. "Sit down," he said.

"But—"

"Or I'll knock you down." He doubled his fist and she collapsed into the leather chair.

His search of the office was as thorough as his search of the earphones had been. Watching him with fear crawling inside her, Nancy realized that he was a man who missed few bets, made few mistakes. The transmitter was hidden under the desk itself, but Lorton found it and knew what it was. He ripped off the tape that held it in place and stood up with it in his hands.

"A transmitter here and a receiver in the outer office," he said. His eyes came down to her. "What have you heard, Nancy?"

"N—nothing. I don't know what you're talking about. What is that thing? Why did you smash my transcriber? You'll get into trouble for this." Fear was an inarticulate panic

crawling inside of her. "Let me go: I haven't done anything. I don't know what you're talking about."

"You said that before," he said.

She could see he was having fun, that he was playing a cat-mouse game with her. But he was also a little worried, not too badly worried. No problem could be serious enough to cause him real worry. "Why did you listen to my private conversations?"

"I didn't, I don't know—"

"What have you heard?"

"Nothing. What was there to hear? I—" She broke off under the pressure of his eyes. He was thinking about the fact that she had listened to his private conversations but the look in his eyes told her he was beginning to think more about something else—that she was a woman. The fear in her rose until it began to block her vocal chords. She made gasping sounds deep in her throat.

"Tell me why you did this."

SHE COULDN'T speak, but she shook her head. If she told him why she had done this, she did not know what would happen but she knew her only hope of safety lay in not revealing her secret. Until he knew *why* she had installed the hidden radio equipment, he would hesitate.

"Who else was in this with you? Who helped you?"

"I'm an FSB agent—" The words came unbidden to her lips. All she knew about the FSB was that the voice had said that an agent of this organization was interviewing somebody by the name of Atkinson. Lorton hadn't liked that. He would like it even less if he thought she was such an agent, perhaps he would hesitate to do anything to her. "I work for the FSB. You better be careful."

For a moment he looked startled and surprised. Then he laughed deep

in his throat. "Quit lying."

"It's true. You'll find out that it's true." She saw he didn't believe her but she also saw he was not certain. He took a quick stride across the office, came back to face her. "What is the FSB?"

"It's—" She didn't know. The lack of real knowledge was visible on her face. "You'll find out."

He thought she was lying but he wasn't quite certain. Until he knew, he would take no definite action. Hope stirred in her like the first faint lights of dawn after a hurricane. Again Lorton took that quick step across the room. She saw there was a definite spot worn in the thick rug where he had walked. He shook his head. "We'll see." His hand moved to his wrist.

There was a soft click somewhere. She cried out in fear and tried to shrink deeper into the corner of the leather chair.

With the click there appeared two feet above his desk a swirling ball of blackness. It seemed to come from nowhere and it came instantly, as if in response to a command. It swirled there, not spinning but in motion none the less.

"Yes," a voice spoke.

Nancy Howard sank even deeper into the corner of the chair. This was the voice she had heard in this office. It came from the ball of blackness. Lorton answered.

"I have discovered that a girl who works in my office has been spying on me and has listened to our conversations. She claims she works for the FSB. I think she is lying but I am not absolutely sure. What suggestions can you make?"

"I will look at her," the mechanical voice said. The ball of blackness moved. It hung a foot away from her face. She shrank from it. Within that

sphere of blackness, she had the impression something was looking out at her. No known organs of vision were involved, no eyes were visible, perhaps *looking* was not the correct word to describe that inspection, perhaps *awareness* came closer to the actual process, but whether or not the ball looked at her, it was certainly aware of her. She had the impression that it probed every molecule of her body, that before its penetrating awareness, she stood utterly naked and alone. A cry formed in her throat and was choked off.

"I see," the voice said.

"What shall I do?" Lorton questioned.

"I can e-rase her," the voice said. At the words, the ball seemed to move closer to her, as if it was eager for the task at hand. Her lips moved. Somewhere in her soul something was praying. But no words came.

"No," Lorton said. "We have to know about her."

"Very well." Reluctance sounded in the voice. "I will send an ambulance and two men. Bring her here and we will question her."

"No!" She screamed a single word and tried to get to her feet. Lorton forced her back into the chair. The ball vanished.

"What was that? What are you going to do with me?"

"Shut up," Lorton said.

She collapsed in the chair.

THE TWO men were not long in coming. Lorton let them in through the door. They wore the white coats of hospital attendants and they carried a folding stretcher. They looked questioningly at Lorton and he nodded toward Nancy. Mechanically, as if this was a matter of no concern to them, they moved toward her.

The sight of the two men moving

toward her aroused in her the knowledge that if she was going to do anything, it had to be now. She leaped to her feet, tried to run. They grabbed her. She tried to fight. In that struggle her clothes were literally torn from her body but she was still trying to fight, down on the floor with one man lying across her, when she felt the hypodermic bite into her hip.

The drug, whatever it was, acted quickly. Five minutes later, completely unconscious, neatly covered by a white blanket, she was on the stretcher and was being carried from the room.

JANUARY expected the three men to force him into a taxicab or a car. Or perhaps they would take him to one of the helicopter landing lots in the Loop. But they didn't put him into a cab, a car, or a 'copter. They marched him straight to Michigan Boulevard, told him to turn left, and took him through the plastic and aluminum doors of one of the most impressive buildings on the street.

As they went through the lobby two white-coated hospital attendants passed them carrying the still body of a young woman on a stretcher. They went through a side entrance where January caught a glimpse of the attendants shoving the stretcher into a waiting ambulance. As the stretcher passed them, Gray Coat, on January's right, gave a startled gasp. The FSB man could not tell whether it was the sight of the girl or of the attendants that startled Gray Coat but the man had certainly recognized either the patient or the attendants. The single start was all the indication Gray Coat gave, then his face was again immediately composed but the look in his eyes indicated growing pressure somewhere inside.

"This way," Gray Coat said, un-

locking a door. Beyond the door, steps led downward.

Below was the basement. Below that was the sub basement. Here, on the sub basement level, heat and water were brought into the building. Here also were the wires for light and telephone. Here, also, a connection was made to the extensive miniature railroad system that lies under Chicago—and under every other large city, a sub-surface railroad that brings coal, freight, and many other supplies to the large buildings, and in turn takes away everything from some finished products of the manufacturers to waste paper and rags.

Blue Suit pushed a button.

"Okay, boys, get going," Gray Suit said. "I'll take it from here."

Blue Suit and Brown Suit went back up the stairs. January thought of the gun under his left shoulder. They hadn't searched him. He waited until Blue Suit and Brown Suit had had enough time to be out of the building, then pulled the gun.

Gray Suit looked at it. Neither surprise nor fear registered on his lean face. He held out his hand. "Give it to me," he said.

"Go to hell!"

Gray Suit shrugged. "Anybody who has enough intelligence to stay sane in your position has too much intelligence to try to use a gun on me."

"Oh," January said. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw that the ring was glowing again. He jerked his head around. In the air behind him a shadow moved. Hastily he handed the gun to Gray Suit. "I didn't know for sure that you and it—" a twist of his head indicated what he meant by it—"were on the same side."

"You know it now." Gray Suit put the gun in his pocket. He looked meditatively at January, seemed about to speak, then changed his mind.

Somewhere a bell clanged. A door opened and a miniature electric locomotive appeared pulling a single car. A driver in greasy overalls with his cap pulled down over one eye looked at Gray Suit.

"A couple of passengers, Jim," Gray Suit said. The motorman seemed accustomed to picking up passengers. He nodded. "After you, please," Gray Suit said to January. The single car was half full of trash. The two men sat side by side on wooden boxes at the front end. Its electric headlight providing illumination, the train moved into the tunnel. In this closed space the noise of its passage was thrown back at them from the walls. In semi-darkness broken only by the beam of occasional lamps set in the tunnel overhead, January was aware that Gray Suit was leaning close to him. He felt the man's fingers seek his hand.

"Take this," Gray Suit whispered in his ear.

January's fingers closed over a tiny bottle about the size of a perfume container.

"As' soon as we hit a dark place, drink the contents," Gray Suit whispered. His mouth was within an inch of January's ear.

"What?"

"Don't ask questions. Do as you are told now or you will do as you are told the rest of your life." The man's voice was a fierce whisper in January's ear commanding him to obedience. But more than the command, there was a pleading note in it, as if Gray Suit was begging him to obey.

The car shot past a light bulb and vanished into darkness.

"Now!" Gray Suit whispered.

JANUARY swallowed the contents of the bottle. It was an oily liquid and it didn't taste good but it pro-

duced a prompt and rather pleasant glow in his stomach. Almost immediately the glow seemed to spread outward from his stomach. January had the impression that he could feel his bloodstream pick up the oily liquid and that he could sense it spreading almost inch by inch over his body. Gray Suit, leaning close to him, was whispering again. "When you realized the *penth* would stop you every time you tried to communicate what you knew to anybody who could understand it, you should have gone crazy. Michaelson, and others, did just that. When you didn't, the Brain had no choice except to bring you here, both for examination, to find out how you kept from going crazy, and also for treatment."

"Treatment? Brain? Michaelson?" January whispered.

They shot under another light and Gray Suit hastily moved away from him. When the light had vanished behind them, the man spoke again.

"You will be questioned. Later you will be strapped to an operating table and treated. After that treatment, you must obey instantly every order given you. Sooner or later, you will have a chance to escape."

"But—"

"The liquid you just drank will neutralize the effect of the treatment. If you hadn't taken it, the treatment you will receive would have robbed you completely of your will to resist. This way, you will retain your faculties. You will have a chance to escape; if you don't give yourself away with some false move."

"Will you be with me?"

"Part of the time I will be. I'll help you if I can, I'll talk to you if I get the chance. But remember that unless you are in some place such as this, where there is so much noise that ordinary talk can't be heard, every word you say can and will be

heard. Don't make a false move. Don't speak a careless word."

"Can I think without being overheard?"

"You can think as much as you please. That's all any of us have left, the privilege of thinking. But no matter what we think, we can't do a single solitary damned thing about it. No more questions. From here on, you're on your own."

WHEN THE next light shot past overhead, Gray Suit was sitting on the far side of the car from him. Who was this man? What was he doing here? What had he meant by reference to treatment, the Brain, and Michaelson? Was this the same Michaelson that Atkinson had meant? Presumably it was. What was this *penth* that must be following them here through this darkened tunnel? Questions tumbled through January's brain. Gray Suit could certainly answer some of them, but Gray Suit, a sombre, hunched figure, squatted on a wooden box on the other side of the car, afraid to talk. The man must have taken a desperate chance even in whispering to him. How much bigger chance had Gray Suit taken in supplying him with the contents of the tiny vial? Only Gray Suit knew.

The train slid to a halt. Gray Suit rose to his feet. With a flashlight, the driver in the engine ahead of them explored the wall beside the cab. So far as January could tell, there were no distinguishing marks on that wall. It was concrete, drippy with moisture, with the marks of the forms in which it had been poured still visible on the surface. The driver seemed to be seeking a particular spot. He grunted, shifted his controls. Gears whined softly and the train moved backward a foot, slowed, stopped. Again the flashlight beam fingered along the wall, found an inch-wide hole, con-

centrated on that. Somewhere a hidden switch clicked. Air sighed. Ponderously, a section of the concrete wall rolled backward, revealing a lighted passage.

"In there," Gray Suit said.

January stepped from the car. Gray Suit followed. They entered the passage. With a sound like the hissing of gigantic air brakes, the wall rolled back into place behind them.

The passage hummed with sound. Somewhere ahead of them was activity. They moved forward. The passage opened into a second, bigger, passage. This in turn opened directly into a large room. Here were people and here also was the source of the sound. The room looked like a large laboratory. Around the side of it men and women were busy. Others were coming and going through passages opening out in other directions.

"Who are these people?" January spoke.

"Slaves of Lorton and of his crystal brain," Gray Suit answered. His voice was tight as if his vocal chords were stretched to the breaking point.

"Slaves?"

"The Brain lies beyond," Gray Suit answered. He broke off. Through one of the passages had come two white-coated men carrying a stretcher. On it was the same girl he had seen back in the lobby of the building where they had entered the railway. They had beaten the ambulance here.

"I saw her before," January spoke. Gray Suit did not answer. His eyes were fastened on the stretcher. Muscles tied themselves into knots at the corners of his jaws. On his forehead a vein throbbled visibly. "Your girl?" January whispered.

"Shut up," Gray Suit spoke from the corner of his mouth. Following behind the stretcher was a third man. January took one look at this third

man and knew he was seeing somebody important. Not only was importance registered in the expensive clothes, it was shown in his bearing. He was haughty, imperious, lord of all he surveyed. The men and women working at the benches around the room looked sideways at this third man. Not a man spoke, not a man moved, only the sidelong glances showed that they were aware of his presence. The sounds of work went into silence. A man dropped a tool with which he was working. It clattered on the concrete floor. He bent hastily to retrieve it, cringing as his fingers groped for the little wrench he had dropped. His manner was that of a badly frightened man who has made some tiny mistake and is expecting punishment far out of proportion to his error.

"Who's the big shot?" January whispered.

"Lorton," Gray Suit answered mechanically. "It isn't often he comes here."

LORTON spoke sharply to the two men carrying the stretcher. They moved directly across the room and stood waiting in front of a door. Lorton stepped around them. A lighted circle appeared in the center of the door. Lorton stood directly in the light. Some identification process was in operation, January guessed, what it was he did not know.

"Open," Lorton spoke.

The door opened. Beyond it January caught a glimpse of darkness, of shadows moving, of a strange misty half light that was neither light nor shadow but seemed to have existence of its own. The two stretcher bearers cringed.

"Get in there," Lorton spoke. His voice was that of a man speaking to reluctant dogs, ordering them to obey. Cringing, carrying the stretcher, they

passed through. Lorton followed them. The door swung shut.

"That's the room of the Brain," Gray Suit spoke. "They've taken her there." His voice was taut to the breaking point. He moved forward to the door, stood in front of the lighted circle. "Howe," he spoke. "With the F.B.S. agent, as ordered."

There was a moment of silence then a mechanical voice answered. "Take the a-gent to room sev-en."

"Follow me," Gray Suit said.

The room to which January was taken was a prison cell. There was a cot and a bucket in the corner. Nothing else. There was a peephole in the middle of the door. "You'll be sent for," Gray Suit said. "It may be tonight, tomorrow, or next week, but it will be sometime."

Somewhere a thin, distant scream sounded. Gray Suit hastily slammed the door. January sat down heavily on the cot, his hand going into his coat pocket for the inevitable cigarette. His fingers touched there a metallic object, the strange little weapon Atkinson had tried to use against the *penit*. No effort had been made to search him, probably that would come later. So far as he knew, the weapon was useless, but he could not guess what might be made of the fact if it was found in his possession. Likewise the ring. He hid both, wedging them under the mattress on the cot.

The summons for him was not long in coming. The door opened. Peered inside the most wrinkled face he had ever seen. The man who owned the face was diminutive in size, almost a midget. Between the wrinkled face and the diminutive stature the man looked like an over-grown chimpanzee, but his eyes were wiser than the eyes of any monkey. They were almost the wisest, most alert eyes the FBS man had ever seen.

"Your turn, bud."

January rose from the cot. The midget led him directly to the door of the room that housed the brain—whatever that was. January took a deep breath. Whatever was in there, he was going to see it. The door opened. He stepped through.

His first dazed impression was that shadows moved away to permit his passage. This room was cold, bitterly cold. He could not guess the temperature but it must have been well below zero. It was a penetrating coldness that went through him, cutting him to the bone. It was an unnatural kind of coldness, a clamminess went with it. Somehow, as he entered this room, he thought of the cold of outer space.

IN THE center of the room rising four feet high from the floor beneath, was a rounded dome of crystal. What the dome was made of January could not distinguish, the thought that came into his mind was that it was made of some kind of plastic. It was almost transparent. Inside it was a tremendously complicated crystal formation. Snow flakes are ice crystals. No two ice crystals are alike. If a million snow flakes had been combined into a single pattern, with every flake uncrushed, with every flake remaining just as it was formed, the resulting formation might have approached the texture of this crystal. Literally hundreds of hair-sized threads led downward from the crystals where they were grouped together into wrist-thick cables that vanished into the floor. The whole surrounding room was one vast switchboard. Whole rows of tiny lights flashed on and off. Behind the shielding of the panels relays clicked, a continuous soft chatter of sound.

Without needing to be told, January knew that this was—the Brain. That it was also the nerve center, the heart and soul, of some vast organization,

he could easily guess.

The room that housed the Brain was alive—with shadows. *Penths*! They moved in restless search in every direction. Directly on top of the brain itself, they crouched, a solid, opaque mass. From this mass they were constantly being detached and as constantly returning. At the sight of them, January felt the cold of outer space itself creep into his brain. His flesh crawled.

Standing beside the Brain was—a man. Lorton! The darting *penth* shadows kept completely away from him. They seemed to recognize in him their master and to stay clear. Lorton stood there. His face was impassive. His dark eyes inspected January, missing nothing. He spoke.

"You are an agent of the Federal Bureau of Security?"

"Yes."

"You interviewed a scientist named Atkinson?"

"I did."

"And he attempted to reveal to you certain forbidden information?"

"I do not know whether or not it was forbidden but he attempted to tell me certain things—yes."

"What things?"

"He said he knew what had happened to Preston and Howe."

"You were interested in that?"

"Naturally."

"Atkinson tried to reveal this information to you?"

"He did."

"Did he succeed?"

"He did not."

"Why didn't he?"

January made a gesture with his thumb. "One of those things got him," he answered.

"Ah." The° sombre eyes were introspective. January had the impression that Lorton was questioning him and listening to his answers and that the Brain was also listening—and

checking those answers against information of its own. He did not know what would happen if he tried to lie, but he knew he had no intention of finding out. All around the room relays were clicking softly, lights were flashing, and *penths* were moving in and out of the parent darkness on top of the crystal structure. When they came out they seemed to slide away into nothingness, to vanish, disappear. He could not tell how they disappeared or where they went but his eyes hurt when he tried to follow them as if his eyeballs were wrenched in their sockets. Also he had the impression that he was not receiving the undivided attention either of Lorton or of the Brain, especially of the latter. While the Brain seemed to watch him and listen to him, it also seemed to be watching a dozen other people at the same time, perhaps listening to hundreds. Information seemed to be coming into it, orders going out, as if it was big enough and complete enough to carry on hundreds of different activities at the same time!

UNDER OTHER circumstances, he would have been tremendously awed at this fact. Now it was only one other development in a world turned topsy-turvy.

The mechanical voice spoke: "How did you keep sane when you discovered you were being followed?"

"I almost did go nuts at first."

"But what saved you?"

"I decided the purpose of the whole maneuver was to drive me insane. This, plus the fact that I am sort of tough-minded, saved me, I guess." The last was added doubtfully.

"You are not certain you are sane?" the mechanical voice questioned.

"Not a bit of it," January answered.

The brain was silent. Lorton spoke: "Do you know a woman by the name

of Nancy Howard, or Nancy Howe?"
"Howard? Howe. There was a scientist named Howe."

"His sister," Lorton answered. "Somehow he managed to communicate with her shortly after she was taken, with the result that she attempted to spy on me. You may have seen the woman on the stretcher. Do you know her or did you ever see her before?"

"No, to both questions?"

"Was she working for the FBS?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Have you communicated with the F B S since you last saw At-kin-son?" the mechanical voice spoke from the Brain.

"You know the answer to that better than I do," January answered.

"Yes," the Brain said. There was a moment of silence, then the Brain spoke to Lorton. "Have you reached a dec-i-sion yet?"

"Yes," Lorton said. "Treat him. It may be that I will want to send him back on his job, to report on the activities of the Bureau."

January was silent. Gray Suit had warned him that he would be treated but Gray Suit had not warned him that he might be sent back on his job, to spy for Lorton and the Brain. He tried not to show it but if once he got out of this place and got the chance, no power on earth would keep him from reporting, not to Lorton, but to the FBS.

As if he was reading his mind, Lorton spoke: "I guess you *will* do it, if I want you to." He spoke with a sureness that was full of meaning and the trace of a smile flickered over his dark face. "You can go now."

Although no signal that he had seen was given, when he turned the door was already opening. The wrinkled face of the chimpanzee was peering in at him. The chimpanzee beckoned. In

response to the summons, January moved out of this room where relays clicked, lights flashed, where there squatted like a monstrous toad a crystal structure that was actually a brain, where shadows came from nothingness and returned to it, and where the biting cold of outer space chilled with the touch of a nameless horror. Why was that room so cold? Did the Brain require refrigeration? There was no answer, now, possibly there was no answer ever.

The door clicked shut behind him.

They were again in the big room where the men and women worked so busily.

"Call me Mike," the chimpanzee man said.

"Hello, Mike," January answered.

"Hello, yourself. You're a cool customer. Most guys have to be carried when they come out of that place. But you come out walking, and not even shivering." Mike shook his head. A trace of admiration showed in the wise eyes. "But don't try it, Pal. Don't try it is all I got to say."

"Don't try what?"

"Don't try to slug me and fight your way out of here. You look like you're thinking about it. It's been tried before and it hasn't worked yet."

"No? There's always a first time."

"A first time, yes, but in this place there's not any second time. Don't try it, pal. Take what ever comes and like it. It's the only way to stay alive." A shudder passed over the slender body.

"Thanks for the indoctrination," January said. "You can call me Joe."

"Sure, Joe. Come with me, Joe."

They moved to another closed door. "Another customer ahead of you. Got to take turns."

"What happens to me here?"

"This is where you get treated," Mike answered. "But don't worry

about it, Pal. It won't hurt very much. But you'll never be the same afterward."

"What if I don't want to be treated?"

"Who the hell cares what you want, Joe? It's what you get that makes you fat. Ah, they're finished. You're next."

The door had opened. Out of it came an ordinary hospital rubber-tired table such as is used to move patients to the operating room and back again to their own quarters. Gray Suit was pushing it. On it was the girl. Her face pale and wan; she lay without moving.

January watched her out of sight. It seemed to him that he had been following right behind her forever. She had been just ahead of him in the big building. She had gone into the room of the Brain just ahead of him. Now she was coming out of this place, again just ahead of him. He wondered if he would ever catch up with her.

"Okay, Joe," Mike said. "Just step inside, please, and don't cause any trouble."

Inside the room were two men, who strapped him to the operating table. Somewhere hidden machinery hummed. A light was brought down close to his eyes. It began to whirl. He tried not to watch it. It beat through his eyelids, pouring into his brain.

He lost consciousness without knowing it had happened.

CHAPTER VI

CONSCIOUSNESS returned slowly to Joe January, bringing with it memories of great pain and the sensation of being pushed and pulled about inside. He had the dazed feeling that something had been done to every molecule in his body, that some pressure had been applied right down to the individual cells and to the sub-microscopic structure within them and

that each cell and each individual molecule was protesting against this outrage. What had been done to him? He lay still and tried to think about that—and tried not to think. Dazed memories floated through his mind. He waited, patiently, for his mind to clear.

He was in bed in some quiet, dark place. Somewhere in the distance there were confused sounds, he tried to make out what they were, gave up the effort. It was better just to lie still and wait. Something would probably happen. He stirred.

Something did happen. The instant he stirred, there was the sound of soft movement somewhere near him. He caught the faint whisper of footsteps. "No shoes," he thought. Somebody with naked feet was approaching him and taking plenty of care about it. He lay still. A vague shadow moved. A voice whispered: "Mr. January."

It was a woman's voice. He wondered if it was the girl who had been just ahead of him for so long. Had he finally caught up with her? He tried to speak. A grunting sound came from his throat. His vocal chords were not yet ready to function.

"Shh!" the girl whispered. "You mustn't make that much noise. If you understand me, nod." A hand found his face. He nodded.

Her lips were very close to his ear. "I've got to talk to you."

He nodded.

In the darkness, he could sense her hesitation and her fear. She had something to tell him but she was desperately afraid she would be overheard. He felt her fingers move the sheet covering him and he realized what she was going to do.

"Hey!" he whispered.

"I can't help it, I've got to talk to you."

A split second later she was under the sheet and he was realizing that her

feet were not the only part of her that was naked.

The shock completely cleared his mind. "But, damn it—"

"Please."

He could feel her trembling. "Please. There isn't any other way for us to talk. We just don't dare take the chance of being overheard."

"All right," he answered. "But it's a hell of a strain to put on a man."

Her lips less than an inch from his ear, she began to whisper. "I am Nancy Howe. I am the sister of William Henry Howe—"

"What? But he was kidnapped!"

"Not so loud. He was kidnapped and brought here and made into one of Lorton's slaves. He's here now. He brought you here."

GRAY SUIT! This time January managed to keep from starting. He remembered how interested Gray Suit had been in this girl and now he knew why. She was his sister and Gray Suit was one of the missing scientists whose disappearance had prompted the formation of the Federal Security Bureau. Lorton had even asked him if he knew this girl or if she worked for the FSB. Apparently she had been spying in Lorton's office. In swift, terse whispers she told him what had happened. "Before he was kidnapped, William Henry suspected what was happening. He told me his suspicions and said that he thought somebody by the name of Lorton was back of the whole thing. Lorton caught me spying on him and brought me here."

"But why didn't your brother report the whole thing to the authorities?"

"Because he couldn't. He didn't have a chance."

"The hell he didn't. When he grabbed me, he was right in the middle of the Loop."

"That didn't make any difference. He had been treated, he was under the control of the Brain. He couldn't say a word, he couldn't take an action without the Brain's knowledge."

"What?"

"I don't understand the process and he didn't have time to explain it to me but the treatment is given to all the slaves of the Brain. It is part hypnosis, part something else. After they have been treated, the slaves have to obey every order given them. Moreover the Brain is aware somehow of their obedience or lack of it. If they disobey, a *penth* is sent instantly, to warn them. If they disregard that warning, they are destroyed. William Henry could not have gone to the authorities without being killed."

January, with his own grim memories of how the *penth* had followed him, did not in the least doubt that ways existed for removing disobedient slaves. "But he talked to me."

"He took a chance that he wouldn't be overheard."

"Has he been treated?"

"Yes. Naturally."

"But you said that no one could disobey when he had been treated. In talking to me, he disobeyed."

"Yes. The slaves are free to think. Rebellious thinking can't be detected, but rebellious actions can. He and some others working with him have succeeded in developing an antidote to the treatment process. If taken after the treatment, it is about ten to fifteen per cent effective. If taken before treatment, it is one hundred per cent effective."

"Was that what he gave me in that tiny bottle?"

"Yes. He gave me the same antidote before I was treated. You and I are the only two free people in this place. And the Brain doesn't know it."

She sounded as if she thought that

meant something. January tried to see what it meant. He couldn't see where it meant anything. "But even if we can act against the Brain, we won't get anywhere. A *penth* will catch us—"

"That's just it," she answered. "The treatment process is what enables the Brain to know where we are at all times. If we can get out of here, untreated, the Brain can't send *penth*s after us *because it won't know where to find us*. So far as it can tell, we will simply have disappeared. We will have a chance to report this whole thing to the proper authorities."

"Hell on wheels, what's holding us? Let's get going!"

SHE CAUGHT him before he could move, pulled him back. "My brother says that as soon as we have made our report to the authorities, we are to find some way to communicate with a man by the name of Atkinson, that this Atkinson has developed a weapon which will repel the *penth*s. It's a light weapon, of some kind. My brother says that any competent technician can duplicate it. Armed with this weapon, we are to come back to this place and destroy the Brain. He says that without the *penth*s, the Brain is helpless."

"Atkinson!" January had heard only this one word. "We are to go to Atkinson?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Yes. He's dead."

"Oh." Her whisper was a strangled sound in the darkness. "My brother didn't know. He has been relying on Atkinson. What happened?"

"A *penth* got him. And not only that but I have his weapon."

"You do?" Hope stirred again in the whispered voice.

"Yeah. It doesn't work."

In the darkness, he could feel her shudder. "But my brother will have

to remain here, under the control of the Brain. To save him, we will have to come back. To come back, we simply have to have a weapon that will stop the *penth*s."

"I saw Atkinson use the weapon on a *penth*. It slowed the beast but did not stop it."

"Well—"

"Shhh!" Soft footsteps sounded in the darkness. He caught Nancy's shoulder, discovered that he didn't have her shoulder, and hastily moved his hand. The footsteps came nearer. A hand touched the bed. January sat up, his fist cocked. "Are you conscious?" a voice whispered.

The speaker was Henry William Howe, alias Gray Suit. January and the girl spoke together.

"I've brought your clothes," Howe said. "You've got to get out of here, right now. The Brain is busy doing something, what I don't know. But you two have got to be gone while it is fully occupied."

In the darkness they dressed hastily. In a terse whisper, January explained about the ring and the weapon that Atkinson had once owned. "I'll get them," Howe said. He moved away into the darkness.

When he returned, he carried the two objects. January slipped the ring on his finger. With that warning device in operation, he felt a lot safer. "Here's something else," Howe said. January's fingers closed around his gun.

"If a slave of the Brain tries to stop you, use it," Howe whispered. "Don't hesitate. He'll thank you. There isn't a person here who wouldn't die gladly if dying gave somebody a chance to stop Lorton and his brain."

He led them through the darkness. They did not go back through the main caverns. Howe used a tiny flashlight and he moved fast, as if

something had to be done quickly. The flashlight revealed a wooden door, which he opened. Beyond lay more darkness with a far-off roar.

"This is the same way you came in," Howe whispered. "I don't dare take the risk of leading you directly to the surface overhead. No matter how busy the Brain is, it wouldn't miss that. You will have to find your own way out of here. If a train catches you, press back against the wall. There's clearance almost everywhere. Good luck." He pressed the flashlight into January's hands.

"Why don't you come with us?" January questioned.

"I don't dare," Howe answered. "No matter where I went, the Brain could locate me. There is some sort of a radio detection device connected with the treatment process, some way by which the Brain can locate instantly any person who has been treated. If I go with you, it will find me, and you too. I've got to stay here. Get going, you two. And—good luck."

THEY STEPPED down to the track. The wooden door closed shut behind them. Staying carefully away from the third rail that powered the electric locomotives that ran on these tracks, they moved furtively through the darkness.

January watched the ring on his finger. The stone did not glow. If they were followed, the *penth* was remaining intangible. "Do you have any idea how to get out of here?" the FSB agent asked.

"Not the slightest," the girl answered. "But there's a way out somewhere."

They moved forward in the darkness. Overhead occasionally they heard deep roaring sounds, trains passing on the surface. January's watch said three o'clock. He assumed

it was three o'clock in the morning, but the watch had stopped. Behind them came a rumble. The rails throbbed.

"Train coming," Nancy Howe whispered.

As they moved to the wall, the headlight caught them. Brakes screeched. January slipped the gun from his pocket. If the driver was Jim, the engineer who had brought him here—

Sparks showed from the third rail as the miniature electric locomotive slid to a halt. An astonished voice said: "Now what in hell could you two be doing down in this place? In the park, yes. On the beach, yes. But here, no!"

January turned the beam of the flashlight into the cab. The round face of an elderly Irishman looked back at him. He hastily slipped the gun back into his pocket.

"We were on a treasure hunt," he said. "The clues led us into the basement of a Loop building."

"Treasure hunt, is it? All I can say is that it's mighty lucky for you the fool killer has got so much business elsewhere. Otherwise he'd have the two of you for sure. Get in that car."

The car was full of ashes. Like two bedragged rats trying to escape from an alley, Joe January and Nancy Howe squatted on top of the ashes. The little train rattled through the darkness, slid to a halt again, this time in front of an open doorway.

"Get out of here," the engineer told them. "And be careful to keep your eye out for that fool killer. He'll get you sure."

They stepped into a sub-basement, went upward past the eyes of a startled janitor who plainly thought they had been smooching somewhere down below. They emerged from the building in the heart of the Loop, with the bright sun of high noon shining in

the sky overhead and hungry pedestrians hurrying along the street to—wherever pedestrians are always hurrying to.

Traffic whistles shrilled, cars, trucks, street cars, and busses rolled along the street. In the sky helicopters beat lazy wings. Far overhead silver wings glistened, the noon flight for Paris. January sucked the sights and the sounds into his mind. Here were thousands of people going about their normal business. None of them had ever heard of such a thing as a crystal brain, or a *penth*. None of them even guessed that such things existed.

The girl clung to him. For the first time he got a good look at her. He liked what he saw. "You haven't screamed once," he said.

"I did my screaming earlier," she answered. "I hope I don't have to do any more of it."

"You and me both," he answered fervidly. His eyes took in the hurrying throngs on the street. "And all this fool killer bait too, although they don't know it."

"What do we do first?" Nancy Howe questioned.

"I'm going to the nearest telephone and put in a call," he said. "You're going to stay back out of sight and watch me while I'm on the phone. If I hang up without completing the call, you're going to get lost—fast."

"Why?"

He told her why. Her face was already pale and cut by lines of fatigue. As he spoke, the lines deepened.

In the phone booth, he picked up the receiver, dialed a number. The stone in the ring remained dull and lifeless but it seemed to him that somewhere in some far distance he could hear relays clicking. He shook the illusion out of his mind.

The long distance connection was made, he spoke into the phone. Then,

as the stone in the ring began to glow, he hung the phone back on the hook.

Either Howe had made a mistake in estimating the efficiency of the antidote to the treatment he had undergone or the elderly Irishman in the locomotive of the miniature railway had been a slave of the Brain.

It didn't much matter who had made the mistake.

All that mattered was that the mistake had been made.

Again he was being followed by a *penth*.

As he stepped out of the phone booth, every muscle in his body was trembling and sweat was spurting from every pore.

In the front of the drug store, a frightened girl slid hastily out of the door and disappeared into the noon-day crowds.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN JANUARY came out of the drug store, he headed straight for the nearest saloon. Fortunately the place turned out to be exactly that, a high ceilinged room with a long mahogany bar, oak tables, and brass spittoons, operating in utter defiance of the polished chromium and glass table places which catered to the more modern crowds. The bartender took one look at the FSB agent and promptly set the bottle on the bar. He took two drinks straight and they helped. There was a steam table at the end of the bar. He took the bottle with him while he inspected the sandwiches—thick slices of ham and fragrant cheese on rye bread. It seemed days had passed since he had eaten last. The food helped too, maybe more than the whiskey, but he clung to the bottle, taking a drink after each sandwich. It was no way to eat and drink, so he stopped eating.

He wondered about the girl, had she escaped? He hoped there was only one *penh* and that it had followed him. He assumed it had. There was a way to check that, of course. He went into the phone booth and checked, coming quickly out again with the knowledge that it *had* followed him. He took two more drinks. Of course there might have been two *penhs*. One might have followed him and the other might have followed Nancy.

At the thought, he took two more drinks.

Why was he still alive?

The only reason he could see was that the Brain hated to use its *penhs* where they could be seen in operation. A man in a crowd vanishing the way he had seen Atkinson vanish would create quite a stir, attracting far too much attention. Apparently the Brain did not want to arouse curiosity, yet, apparently it wanted to keep its existence hidden, but January did not doubt that the time would come when the Brain would announce its presence.

The potentialities of the thing were beyond imagination. With it, Lorton could rule a world. Slaves of the Brain installed in the right places, the police force, the governmental agencies, would give Lorton more power than Caësar, Hitler, or Stalin ever had. What could be done to stop it? What could be done to get rid of that invisible *penh* that followed January, watching every move?

Sometime in the middle of the afternoon the answer occurred to January. It was so simple he wondered why he had not thought of it before. Paying his bill, he left the saloon.

The girl at the reception desk was a very superior creature. Her nails were perfect, her hair-do was just

right, and her manner was nicely calculated to throw a chill into anybody who accidentally wandered into these exalted premises. Her motto was "No peddlers allowed." Privately it was her thought that if any peddling was going to be done around these premises, she was going to do it. She looked up as this unshaven, unkempt man approached her desk.

From his appearance, she judged he had slept in his clothes. From his breath, she was quite certain he was drunk. She couldn't understand quite how he had got up here, obviously he hadn't used the private elevator, but she assumed he had used one of the regular elevators, then walked up the stairs to this level. It didn't much matter how he had gotten here, he could go back the same way. She froze her face as he approached her desk.

"Is Mr. Lorton in, honey?"

For a moment, so outraged was she at being called honey by so disreputable a person, she considered telling him bluntly that Mr. Lorton was not in. But that would be too easy. She would needle him first. "Do you have an appointment?" she asked sweetly.

"No, can't say I do. Is he in?"

"Yes, he's in. Whom shall I say is calling?"

The bum grinned at her without malice. Reaching inside the waist-high door, he clicked the inside latch, and walked in. And walked right past her. "Don't say anybody is calling, honey."

JOE JANUARY was not awed by superior creatures nor impressed by them. To his mind, they came a dime a dozen. He walked past her and through the big door.

Lorton looked up from his desk. January closed the door behind him. He had never seen a man with more

surprise on his face than was on Lorton's face now. Perhaps his presence here accounted for it; perhaps it was the gun he had drawn as he came through the door. He moved swiftly forward until he was standing just across the desk from Lorton.

"At this distance, I can't miss," he said. "The slugs in this gun go right through you. If you as much as bat an eye-lash without my permission, I'll put all six of them through you. Get your hands up."

Lorton lifted his hands. "How—how did you get here? You—you were—"

"Treated?" January supplied the word. "Maybe it didn't take."

Lorton's face registered consternation. "But— That isn't possible. It always takes. It—" He made a motion to bring his hands down.

January's finger tightened on the trigger of the gun. "If you are thinking a *penth* can take me, think again. I'll put six bullets through you before the *penth* is finished with me. You made a mistake."

The hands went swiftly up again. Lorton's lips moved. "And after the bullets go through me, then what?" he said.

January sighed. "I knew you would think of that." He shrugged. "Sometimes a man has got to die, Lorton. After I put the bullets through you, I might die. It depends on whether or not the Brain is capable of carrying on without orders from you. I don't know the answer to that but I got to take a chance. There's some things I want to know. First, I got a little follower."

"You mean a *penth*?"

"Yes. How'd I get it?"

"I—I don't know."

"You don't know?" Was the man lying?

"I—I can find out."

"How?"

"I'll make contact with the Brain."

January was silent, considering the

problem. Any way he turned, he was taking a chance. "All right. Make contact. But remember how fast I can pull the trigger on this." He wiggled the gun.

"I'll have to send out the signal."

"All right. Send it out. But don't make any mistakes."

Lorton's right hand moved to the watch on his left wrist. He pressed something there, what it was January could not see. The response he could see. A *penth* buzzed in the room. January almost pulled the trigger then. It took every erg of will power he possessed to keep from emptying the gun. Lorton spoke not to him but to the *penth*. "That FSB agent is here."

"I know," the mechanical voice answered. "I—I could not an-tic-i-pate his intention. I—I—"

If this was the Brain speaking, and January was sure it was, then the Brain was worried.

"He says he is followed by a *penth*."

"He is telling the truth."

"Damn you!" For an instant, violent rage sounded in Lorton's voice. "Then you knew he was coming here. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I couldn't. I decided it was best—"

"Why didn't you destroy him?"

"I—" The Brain seemed to be having trouble finding answers. Under other circumstances, January might have found a sort of grim satisfaction in this spectacle of Lorton arguing with the Brain but the ice he was skating on was far too thin for him to enjoy anything.

"I—I can destroy him now," the Brain volunteered. On January's finger the already glowing ring became a more violent red. He knew the *penth* that had followed him was being materialized in the room.

"No!" Lorton screamed the command. "He'll kill me first."

"How right you are," January said. The muzzle of the gun did not waver from Lorton's chest. "Six bullets. All of them going right through you."

THERE WAS consternation on Lorton's face. Somewhere else there was consternation too. Again January had the impression of far-off relays clicking violently as the crystal brain sought to find a solution to this problem. "I—but—it will be fast," the Brain said.

"But not fast enough," Lorton shouted.

"Right again," January said.

"But if he kills you, I will kill him," the Brain said.

"What good will that do me?" Lorton screamed.

"You never miss a point," January said. "The only mistake you ever made lay in not realizing that if you threatened a man too much—and the little pal who has been going around with me qualifies as too much of a threat—there comes a time when a man gives himself up as being as good as dead already. When a man reaches that point, he is really dangerous." He hesitated for a moment, then spoke grimly. "I passed that point some time back."

"But what shall I do?" the Brain spoke from the *penth*.

"How did I get my little pal?" January spoke. "That puzzles me."

"Shall I tell him?" the Brain spoke to Lorton.

"Of course. He'll kill me. He means it."

"The engineer who picked you up on the railway is my man," the Brain answered. "He reported your presence. I tried to call you back. At this point, I realized that somehow my treatment process had failed. I am trying now to discover—" The scratchy mechanical voice went into silence.

"The Irishman," January said. "And he seemed such a nice guy." He meditated darkly on the iniquity of people who seemed to be nice guys.

"Can I take my hands down?" Lorton spoke.

"Nope. Keep 'em up."

"But I just want to open my desk drawer."

"Something interesting in there?"

"Very. Take a look and see." Lorton licked his lips.

Cautiously, January moved around the desk. He stepped behind Lorton. "You open the drawer, sweetheart." The muzzle of the gun was pushed against Lorton's backbone. "Don't make any mistakes."

Very gently, Lorton slid open the drawer. January looked down at what was revealed. Each held by a rubber band, there were stacks of bills there. The one on top was a thousand dollar bill. January took a deep breath.

"They're all thousands," Lorton spoke. "Twenty-five in each package."

January laughed. "No, thanks, sweetheart."

Lorton spoke: "What do you want? You can have it. Women—"

"One would suit me," January answered. "I want something else."

"What?" Lorton sounded as if he was about to take hope again.

"Three things. First, call off the *penth* that is following me."

"Granted. Remove it." The last two words were spoken to the ball of darkness hovering in the air.

"But—" the Brain protested.

"Do as you are told!" Lorton shouted.

"Very well."

THERE WERE two balls of darkness in the room, the one that obeyed Lorton and through which he spoke to the Brain, the second that followed January. The second one was

incompletely materialized at present. As the Brain spoke, it swirled, vanished. Had it gone back to the Brain? January, remembering the way the *penth*s had appeared and disappeared in that ice cold room that housed the brain, suspected it had, suspected also that the journey had not been made through any kind of space the human mind knew. But that was something else. He had no time for such speculations.

"It's done," Lorton said.

"The second thing, if there is a *penth* following Nancy Howe, I want it called off."

"Is there?" Lorton spoke.

"No," the Brain answered. Agitation sounded in the mechanical voice. "They tricked me. I—I thought one was enough. They separated suddenly. Before I could send the second *penth*—"

"Good," January said. And meant it. The wave of relief that swept through him was a heady dizziness in his mind. She was safe! She had gotten away!

"What's the third thing?" Lorton questioned.

"How do you call your little pal?" He nodded toward the *penth* remaining in the room. "That is, how do you get him to come when you want him?"

Lorton exhibited his watch. "A special radio transmitter is built into the case of this watch. When I send out a signal the Brain sends a *penth* to me."

"Good," January said. "Good. Send him away."

For a split second Lorton hesitated. January had the impression that the Brain, which must be watching and hearing everything happening here, was also hesitating, and trying to decide what action he would take next. He pushed the muzzle of the gun against a vertebra in Lorton's backbone.

"That's all," Lorton said. "Take it away."

The *penth* swirled and vanished.

"I feel almost naked without one of those things breathing down my neck," January said. He eyed the crystal setting of the ring. The glow was gone. No materialized or partly materialized *penth* was present in the room. The Brain was cut off from all knowledge of what was happening here. "Take off your watch," he said.

"Huh? What? I mean—"

"Take it off," January said. No mule skinner ever got more snap in the crack of a whip than January did in his voice. Reluctantly Lorton slid the watch from his hand. January took it from his hand, examined it carefully. "How do you use it to call one of your little pals?" he said.

"Just press the stem," Lorton answered.

The FSB man carefully placed the watch in his coat pocket. He moved around to the far side of the desk. Lorton watched him. "I assume you wanted to talk to me without the Brain knowing what you were saying?"

"You're partly right, sweetheart. I want to talk. You're right that far. But not to you." He pointed to the phones. "Which one of these is a direct wire to central?"

LORTON DIDN'T answer but his straying eyes revealed which phone it was. January picked it up. He laid the receiver on the desk. "I'm going to dial a number and I'm going to do a little talking. If you so much as bat an eye until I'm finished, I'll kill you if it's the last act I ever perform on this earth."

"Was that what you wanted?" Lorton gasped. "I thought you—"

"It seems to me that half my life I've been wanting to talk on a tele-

phone without being gobbled up alive," January answered. "Now I've got the chance. If I were you, sweetheart— No. Sit down. And stay sitting down. If anything happens to me before this call is finished, you'll find yourself with a bellyful of lead."

Lorton had half-risen from his chair. Under the pressure of the gun, he sank back again. The knowledge of power that had sat so heavily on his face was fleeing now.

"Don't move, sweetheart," January said. He dialed the number, spoke, "Direct connection to the chief of the FSB. January calling."

"Yes, sir." The phone clicked. He watched the stone on the ring that Atkinson had once owned. If a tinge of red appeared, he fully intended to empty the gun into Lorton's body. The stone remained—dull and lifeless. An instant later he was pouring out into the phone everything that had happened. Or trying to. If he was too incoherent to make sense, he couldn't help it.

"Where are you, January?" the chief spoke.

"Chicago."

"Where in Chicago?"

He gave the address.

"Stay put," the chief said. "I'll have somebody there to help you in ten minutes."

"Ten minutes?" Speed such as this was not to be expected even from the FSB. "When we learned that Atkinson was missing, we started looking for you. When your partial message came through, we started looking even harder. I've got twenty men in Chicago right now looking for you, and more on the way. I've got a mobile radio unit in operation there now. My men are carrying miniature receivers. They'll be on their way to you as soon as I put your address on the air. Hold on, January. Help is on the way."

"I'll hold on."

The first agent arrived in seven minutes. The others came later.

They came fast and left even faster. January insisted on it. "We got to get him to some place where we can talk to him in safety." He pointed to the dazed Lorton on the other side of the desk. "To do that, we got to move fast. If we don't move fast enough, the chances are we'll never move at all."

What he meant was, they had to get away before the Brain sent a *penth* to find out what was going on. They had Lorton. But they didn't have the Brain.

"We got the head of a snake," January said. "But this snake has a worse stinger in this tail than in the fangs in his mouth. Move."

They moved. When they went out they took Lorton with them.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN THE New Federal Building had been constructed in Chicago in 1960 the architects had carried out one aspect of governmental building policy that had been in effect for over a decade, namely, as nearly as possible to make all government buildings atom bomb proof.

There is, of course, no such thing as a building that is proof against a direct hit by an atom bomb. At the terrific temperatures generated by the fission of plutonium, stone and metal simply volatilize, but certain precautions can be taken against a near miss, of which depth and concrete in the order named are the most important.

In constructing this building, depth had been achieved simply by digging deep and the concrete had been poured from a lavish hand. The building, impregnable against ordinary attack, was the safest structure in Chicago. At the

deepest level there was maintained an elaborate set of offices, a large-scale testing laboratory, and a communication network that could reach every corner of the United States. Stored water, stored food, and its own electrical generating system would allow the occupants of the sub-surface levels to exist indefinitely without contact with the outside world. Carefully disguised steel doors barred entrance to the lower levels.

In an office in the lower level of this building five men were in conference. One was Warren Carter, chief of the Federal Security Bureau. A military rocket plane had flown him in from Washington. He had brought with him an assistant. The third member of the group was Rick Blackstone, Federal Bureau of Investigation agent-in-charge of the Chicago District. He also had an assistant with him. The fifth member of the group was Joe January.

Although it made no difference here, night had long since fallen outside. January had had a shave, a bath. Food and clean clothes had made him feel so much better that he was almost willing to stay alive.

From where he sat in the office, he could look through an open door and see in a laboratory a man who was most unhappy. The man was Giles Lorton.

Lorton was getting his lumps.

For hours, agents had been questioning him. They had gotten no information beyond the bare statement of his name, age, and address. Lorton had spent his time yelling for his lawyer. His fingerprints had been taken and were now being checked in an effort to discover who he actually was.

Lorton was quite a mystery to the agents. The big question was how he had gotten control of the Brain.

There were other questions about Lorton and since he refused to answer

any of them, the lab technicians were preparing to use pentathal on him. Under the influence of this "truth drug" a man coughed up his guts.

CARTER, the FSB chief, was squirming over the necessity of using this drug not only because the evidence thus gathered could not be used in court but also because Lorton's lawyers would yell to high heaven that the third degree had been used on their client, but Carter, even though he was squirming, was prepared to go ahead and order the use of the drug. He had to do it. It was vitally important for them to learn what Lorton knew and that as quickly as possible.

Without his help, they couldn't even locate the Brain.

Given time, they could locate it, but days or weeks might be required. They didn't have weeks to spend, they didn't have days, maybe they didn't even have hours.

Nancy Howe was missing. She had not reported to the police, to the FBI, or to the FSB. It was possible, of course, that she had not as yet dared to report, but it was also possible that the Brain had finally succeeded in locating her and that, under the threat of a *penkh*, she was being held captive.

Every time he thought of what might have happened to her, January had to fight himself to keep from getting up and going into the lab and kicking the truth out of Lorton personally.

January could not reveal where the Brain was hidden. All he knew was that it was underground and that the miniature railway system under the Loop made contact with it but remembering how the slave engineer had used the flashlight in locating the exact spot where the door opened from the railway into the passage which led to the Brain, he knew that he would

need days and maybe weeks just to find the same spot again.

He didn't want to go looking for that spot.

He didn't believe he would ever live long enough to find it.

Certain steps had been taken. A whole staff of men, working with a complete map of the underground railway system, were searching for places where the Brain *might* be located. Even these men were not too anxious to find the right spot.

They liked life as well as anybody else.

Other steps had also been taken. Atkinson's laboratory had been raided and every note-book, every sheet of paper, every drawing, every uncompleted piece of apparatus had been brought here. Another staff of experts was going through this material. They were also examining the little light weapon that Atkinson had tried to use on the *penth*.

January had turned the weapon over to them.

Atkinson had hoped it could be used against a *penth*.

The men in the laboratory had the same hope.

A preliminary report on the operation of the weapon had already been made to January by a sweating physicist who had been called in from the staff of a local university to investigate the light gun. "Actually, it projects a high frequency vibration field along with intense visible light. From what notes he left, Atkinson seemed to think that the tuning of the field was of the utmost importance."

The physicist was named Wishwell. He was a sweating, scared little man. Although he had repeated time and time again that he did not believe that such a thing as a *penth* existed or could exist, he was working like a fool trying to solve the secret of the light gun.

Doubt as to the existence of such things as *penth*s or even the Brain itself had been expressed in other quarters. Even Carter, chief of the FSB, had been doubtful. Support of January's story had come from two different sources. The first source had been Blackstone. "I would say it's the biggest bunch of hot air I have ever seen except that we have been picking up rumors from other sources which tell the same story. In one instance we've got the report of a man who claimed he *saw* a black ball just as you describe these *penth*s eat a living man."

AFTER BLACKSTONE had spoken, there hadn't been much more argument as to whether or not such things as *penth*s could exist. A little later all argument had stopped. A report had come in from the police. "Black ball chases man down State Street. Overtaken, the man is seen to vanish. Special reserves have been called out to control the panic among the spectators."

After this report had come in, no one had really doubted January's story, not even Wishwell.

"Those damned *penth*s could run everybody out of the Loop!" Blackstone had muttered.

"Not as long as we got the big shot," January answered. He nodded toward the laboratory where Lorton was again yelling for his lawyers. "Obviously the Brain can act without his direction but it cannot take action against us as long as we have him. Lorton is the key to the whole thing. When he talks, we'll know what to do." He looked meaningfully at Carter. "Chief, the sooner you order him shot full of truth juice, the quicker we'll get at the bottom of this thing."

"Well—"

"And the better chance we'll have of staying alive," January ended.

"That includes you and a lot of other people, Chief."

"All right," Carter said. "But the Lord help the whole lot of us when his lawyers get us into court."

"Quit worrying. I'll give you nine to one we never see the inside of a court."

"Why not?"

"We won't live that long," January answered. "Come on. I want to watch Lorton get his hide full of truth juice. I think I'll enjoy seeing him squirm." He rose, moved into the adjoining laboratory. The whole group followed him. Lorton looked at them from apprehensive eyes.

"I demand to be allowed to talk to my attorney. I demand to know what charges are lodged against me."

"You got a lot of guts, sweetheart," January said. "Remember me? I'm the guy who saw Atkinson die. You ordered that execution, didn't you, sweetheart?"

Lorton goggled at him. "I—I—"

"Stick him, boys," January said to the technicians. "Dull up the needles a bit before you run them through his hide."

The technicians didn't dull the needles but Lorton yelled as much as if they had.

The drug was slow in taking effect. Before Lorton had begun to talk, an aide from the communications department had called Carter out of the room. When the FSB chief returned, he motioned to January. "There's a man on the phone who wants to talk to you."

"To me? How the hell does he know I'm here?"

"He doesn't. The call is being relayed back from Washington. He doesn't know where you are. He says his name is Howe and that it is very important for him to talk to you."

"Howe! Holy hell!" January was already out of the room.

CLIPPED and terse, Gray Suit's voice came over the wire. "January, where are you? I've got to see you right now. Hell's broken loose for sure."

"What do you mean?"

"Something has happened to Lorton," Howe's voice came. "I don't know what happened, but something—"

"I know," January said. "We've got him."

"You've got him?"

"Tight and fast. We're starting to give him truth serum."

"The truth serum?"

"Yeah. He's mighty reluctant to talk. This dope will change his mind."

There was a moment of silence, then Howe's voice came again. "January, I've got to see you right away."

"Not so fast. I keep remembering one thing."

"What thing?"

"That you're a slave of the Brain."

A laugh sounded. "I've licked it. I've broken the chains, January. Otherwise how do you think I would be able to talk to you? January, I've got to see you right now. I know how to stop the Brain."

Desperate urgency sounded in his voice.

"How?"

"I can't tell you, over the phone. Hell's broken loose, January. The penths are turning this city upside down, looking for Lorton. If they don't find him, I don't know what will happen, but it may be a massacre. The Brain may herd thousands of people into some building and start killing them. It may keep right on killing them until Lorton is produced. January, I've got to see you."

"Stay right where you are and I'll have you picked up." He got the address from Howe, called the police department, had a squad car sent for the man.

Gray Suit was trembling when he was brought to the lower levels. His face was gray with globules of sweat standing out on a pasty skin. "Has Lorton talked yet?" was his first question.

"They're working on him now," January answered.

"Where—where is he?"

January nodded toward the closed door of the laboratory. A split second after he made the gesture he knew he had made a mistake, knew that admitting this man here had been a most horrible mistake.

From the laboratory came a wild scream of a man. The door was jerked open. Five men tried to get through that door at the same instant. Through the opening thus revealed, January caught a glimpse of Lorton lying on a table.

Hissing in the air above him was a *penth*.

"You—you brought that thing here!" January gasped.

"I—I couldn't help it," Gray Suit's choked voice came. "I—I am not only a slave—forced to do as I'm told—but—but the Brain has Nancy."

"And now it has us!" January whispered. Carter, Blackstone, their aides, and the technicians from the laboratory, piled through the door. To them, the *penth* had seemed to materialize out of nowhere. When that ball of swirling blackness appeared, panic hit them.

Somewhere, in the far distance of another world, an excited man was yelling: "I've got it."

But even if he was in a panic, as he came through the door Blackstone was pulling a gun. He had courage, did this man of the FBI. He spun around the door, faced back into the lab. The gun thundered in his hand.

The slugs probably hit the *penth*, Blackstone was too good a marksman

to miss at this close range. But for all the effect they had, they might as well have missed.

The *penth* moved—toward Lorton.

JANUARY'S hair stood on end. He had expected the *penth* to move toward the fleeing men, or toward him, or in any direction except toward Lorton.

Lorton was the big shot, he was the boss. He was the ruler of the Brain.

But master or not, the *penth* was moving toward him.

Even in his drugged state, he saw the moving ball of blackness. He must have guessed its intention. Or perhaps he knew. He screamed.

The chilled mechanical voice of the brain whispered in the room.

"You fool! If you had not order-ed At-kin-son killed in the pres-ence of the FSB a-gent, this would not have happened. You made a mistake. I have no use for defective tools."

"But—wait!" Lorton screamed.

"I do not need you any lon-ger," the mechanical voice answered. "You are a source of dan-ger to me. You will tell every-thing you know. There-fore—"

The *penth* moved closer. Lorton's scream rose up, up, up, until it seemed as if his vocal chords were being ripped from his throat. Blackstone's gun thundered again. The acrid fumes of burned powder swirled through the office. The *penth* moved down, down.

It touched Lorton. Abruptly the scream went into silence. For a split second January had a glimpse of a body heaving at the straps that held it to the table, then the body was gone.

As Atkinson had gone. Gone from where it was to somewhere else. Eaten, destroyed, shoved into another space.

"Beat it!" January yelled.

It seemed to him that he became a

part of a wave of men who fought their way out of the office and into the corridor outside. A *penth* had found its way into the steel and concrete underground fortress that had been designed to withstand anything except a direct hit from an atom bomb.

January had assumed that as long as they had Lorton, the Brain was licked. Not until the *penth* had materialized did he realize that Lorton, instead of being the master of the Brain, was only a tool of that monstrous structure of crystal, perhaps not quite a slave as others were—otherwise the Brain would have been able to locate him instantly—but a tool just the same.

For a time Lorton had been a useful tool. Ceasing being useful, he had been destroyed.

"We've got to get out of here!" January shouted. "We've got to get lost."

Perhaps, if they could escape, if they could find some secret hideaway, they could yet devise some method of destroying the Crystal Brain.

If they could escape!

In response to his voice, the wave of men poured down the corridor. These were tough men, hard-boiled men, tough-minded men. They would face death cheerfully, as being a part of their duty, a calculated risk they were prepared to take. But this *penth* that came out of nowhere and destroyed a man they could not face.

Not now at least. Not while panic rolled through them like a tidal wave rolling over an island. Later, when the panic had worn itself out, they would regroup and come back to face even a *penth*.

If there was a later!

A man yelled: "That damned thing is following us."

Swirling down the corridor behind them was the *penth*.

Ahead of them a little man appeared again in the door of a lab to yell: "I've

got it." In his hand he held a little gadget.

He was Wishwell, the physicist.

He saw the tide of men pouring toward him. A look of alarm appeared on his face.

He saw the *penth* following them.

He had denied, indignately, that such a thing as a *penth* could exist.

Now, for the first time, he saw one.

The alarm on his face crystallized into an expression of acute panic.

"Wh—wh—what is that thing?"

"A *penth*!" someone shouted.

Wishwell lifted the little weapon that he held in his hand. The beam of light that flared from it was an intense violet in color.

CHAPTER IX

THE GIRL heard the shots as they sounded through the loudspeaker in the room of the Brain. The sounds were coming from elsewhere, she knew, and were being transmitted back to the Brain by the unique radio system of the *penths*. She also heard the screams and the voice speaking from the Brain.

Then came the sound of running footsteps. Voices shouted. She could not make out what was being said.

What happened after that she did not know. Suddenly every clicking relay in the banked panels around the Brain went dead. A cry like nothing she had ever heard before boomed through the room.

She was busy working replacing a burned-out relay in one of the panels. After being brought here, she had been "treated" again. The treatment had not taken effect but this fact she hid on pain of sudden death. She obeyed every order she received, promptly and willingly, knowing that the first sign of disobedience would be the end of her.

At the sound of the cry, she turned her head to look at the Brain. The

blackness that hung above the massed crystals was writhing. A constant stream of *penth*s were materializing in the room and were flowing into it, merging themselves with it.

The blackness twisted like it was alive. The cry sounded again. It was a cry of pain, of agony, of deep hurt.

Somewhere, somehow, something had been hurt. And hurt badly. It was crying out in pain. Mixed with the wail of pain was burning anger, furious hate. The cry said that the something which had been hurt would get revenge for the pain it was suffering.

She saw the something get its revenge.

The door opened. A slave stood there. The whole ball of blackness detached itself from the top of the Brain and rolled toward the slave. He screamed and tried to draw away. The ball of blackness rolled over him, engulfed him, swallowed him up.

Something had been hurt, now it had hurt this slave, as revenge.

As though relishing the feel of the pain he had suffered, the ball of blackness hung over the spot where the slave had stood. Then it lifted and settled itself again on top of the Crystal Brain.

In that moment Nancy Howe grasped the horrible truth about the Brain. It shocked her to the bottom of her soul. It hit her as the charge of electric current hits a man strapped in the death chair, as a bolt of lightning hits a victim who has taken refuge under a tree during a thunderstorm, shocking to the point of death itself, but not killing. In this cold room she felt the bite of a deeper cold, a numbing, destroying feeling.

She knew the secret truth about the Brain.

The truth was so hideous that, as lightning striking a power line knocks out the electric lights, her mind was knocked out. She slid to the floor.

She did not know how long she was unconscious. She recovered, vaguely, at the feel of strong hands moving under her arms and lifting her. She cried out, once.

Mike's voice came, soothingly. "It's all right, sis. You just chucked a faint because of the cold in here. Just take it easy and you'll be all right."

"Oh, Mike." To her eyes the chimpanzee face looked like the features of Sir Galahad.

MIKE LIFTED her in strong arms, carried her from the room. Another slave had already taken over her unfinished task. All around the room, the relays were chattering again. The Brain was functioning. But the relays seemed to be clicking faster now, as though driven by a rising emergency.

Whatever that emergency, the Brain seemed to be adequate to meet it.

Within the hour she saw the first steps taken to cope with that emergency. Slaves who had been hastily dispatched on some errand returned with machine guns, which they set up to cover the underground passages.

"They raided an armory," Mike managed to whisper to her. "*Penth*s went in and knocked out the guards. The boys went in and helped themselves to all the guns and ammo they wanted. Nothing to it." He shrugged. "They could take the mint the same way if the Brain wanted 'em to."

"Machine guns!" She worried with the idea. "That must mean the Brain thinks we are going to be attacked. Otherwise it would not have gotten the guns."

"What else could it mean?"

"But—are we going to use those guns against our friends? I mean, if the place is attacked."

The chimpanzee face was a mass of wrinkles. "You name anything else we *can* do and we'll do it. We're slaves, sis. We do as we are told. Or else."

She knew what the "or else" meant. But she saw another demonstration of it. One of the men working at the big benches in the main room dropped a tool. The hissing sound came instantly. He had time to scream once. But not twice before the *penth* had him.

In the silence that followed, Mike managed to whisper. "The slightest slip from now on—and bingo!"

The irritated and apparently frightened Brain, working under pressure, had no sympathy for its human tools. Nor was it taking any chances that they would betray it.

She looked always for her brother, but did not find him. She did not dare ask questions, except to Mike, and from him all she got was a shrug and the whispered statement that her brother had been sent somewhere.

As soon as the machine guns were set up, the slaves were assembled in the main chamber and set to work building something, what they did not know. The parts that went into it were improvised from the equipment on hand. Radio transmitting tubes were brought up from the store rooms, other equipment assembled.

"It's a weapon of some kind," Mike whispered.

"But what about the machine guns? I should think they would be enough, the guns and the *penth*s. What else could be needed?"

"I don't know," Mike answered. "The Brain seems to think something else is needed or it wouldn't have us building this."

"What kind of a weapon is it?"

"I'm scared to think," the little man answered.

THEY SOON learned what the weapon did. A cone of wires was set up on top of the construction. Like a radar antenna, it could be swung to point in any direction. When the weap-

on was finished, a slave was ordered to stand to one side.

The radar cone, under the direct operation of the Brain, swung around to point at the man. Out from it lashed—nothing. Or nothing that could be seen. But the slave exploded. Bits of battered flesh, blood, fragments of bone, spattered the walls. Steam puffed violently outward. The stench was sickening.

"It's a ray of some kind," Mike muttered. "Turns the body fluids into super-heated steam." He mused darkly. "God, I'd hate to be one of the boys who come in here to try to take the Brain. If the *penth*s or the machine guns don't get 'em, this damned thing will."

Nancy Howe was violently sick. A heavy wrench caught her eye. She picked it up. Mike, sensing her attention, grabbed her arm, held it.

"Don't be stupid, sis. If you throw that wrench, sure, you'll bust the tubes in that damned weapon, but after a *penth* has taken care of you, me and some of the boys will put in new tubes. You won't gain anything."

He broke off. Somewhere in the near vicinity a muffled blast had sounded. Under their feet the concrete floor trembled.

Far-off, a voice yelled. "Okay, boys, the door's down. Come on. We're going in."

"They've blasted the door that leads to the underground railway," Mike whispered. "The police, or somebody, is coming." Exultation sounded in his voice. He had lived for this day, for this hour, when he would be a slave no longer.

So had all the others. Hope, like a living flame, ran through the room.

Mike's exultation was short-lived. "To the machine guns!" the orders of the Brain pounded through the room. Mike, and the others moved to obey.

The cone on top of the ray projector

swung around to face the passage from which the attack must come.

Nancy Howe threw the wrench.

It struck in the middle of the bank of tubes which energized the weapon. Broken glass splashed outward. Filaments, suddenly oxidizing in air, flared red, then burned white, then went out in little puffs of smoke.

With the filaments burned out, the ray projector would not function.

Nancy Howe threw herself backward into the nearest room, quickly but silently closed the door. She lay flat on the floor, shivering. There was just a chance that the attention of the Brain was so completely concentrated on the emergency of the explosion that it had not seen who threw the tool that wrecked the ray projector.

The Brain might not have the opportunity to hunt for the guilty person.

In that case, she had a chance to stay alive.

Otherwise, at any moment, a *penth* would materialize above her head and that would be the end of her, the end of Nancy Howe, who as Nancy Howard, had tried to solve the mystery of Giles Lorton and the Crystal Brain.

She closed her eyes and tried to pray.

Outside, she heard the chatter of the machine guns begin.

CHAPTER X

WHEN THE first machine gun slug went past his head, Joe January ducked back out of the passage that led to the underground quarters of the Brain.

"Everybody back," he yelled.

He had not expected to find machine guns here. When he had been here before, there had been no guns in sight. *Penths*, yes. *Penths* by the dozens, *penths* by the hundreds. But no machine guns. He had expected slaves,

such as William Henry Howe, now confined in a strait jacket and under complete sedation in a hospital, to try to fight the attackers. The Brain had tried to call Howe back to it, after Lorton was killed. He had put up a stiff fight before he was overcome. January expected the slaves here to put up an equally stiff fight.

Machine gun slugs howled past them, smashing into the concrete wall on the other side of the railroad.

"G—golly, what are those things?" a fretful little man quavered. It was Wishwell, the physicist, who asked the question. Wishwell had never heard a machine gun in operation and did not know how one sounded.

Blackstone explained to him.

"Gas masks!" January shouted. Even though he had not expected to find machine guns here, he had a way to deal with them. At his order, dozens of men spread along the track of the railroad began to don masks.

"Okay, roll her up," The FSB agent ordered. In response to the command, a car of the miniature railway began to edge closer to the opening the explosion had made. Powerful lights were mounted on the car. The engineer of the locomotive was not one of the regular employees of the railroad. No regular employee was at work today. The operating group had been replaced, suddenly, with no explanation given, as soon as they reported for work. January was taking no chances on having a railroad worker who was also a slave of the Brain report what was in progress. He remembered too well the Irish engineer who had taken them out of the place when they were fleeing from the Brain.

He was taking no chances at all, if he could help it. Every contingency that could be anticipated had been anticipated, he hoped.

The car stopped. It did not quite reach the opening that had been blown

in the wall. In the back of it a man stood up. With a short-barrelled gun, he began firing into the tunnel. The gun he was using did not explode, it went off with a heavy phut! He fired at an angle into the opening, firing contact shells that exploded on impact and released a flood of invisible odorless gas.

When he started firing, machine gun slugs still howled from the opening. At the second shot, a yell sounded inside. It was a choked yell. At the third shot, the machine gun stopped, abruptly, then started again.

January, crouching against the wall and fitting the mask over his face, could almost see what had happened inside. The gunner had got himself a snoot-full of gas and had gone down. A second man had pulled him away from the gun and had taken his place.

The gun stopped again.

"Second gunner gone," January said. He started up, then pulled back down as another machine gun began firing.

THE GAS gunner in the railroad car was methodically reloading the short, big-barrelled gas weapon. He began to fire again, pouring a flood of the heavy bursting shells into the tunnel. The second machine gun went into silence.

Leaning over the car, the gunner called down. "Give that gas five minutes to take effect."

January nodded, looked at his watch. Blackstone, Wishwell, and Carter moved up close to him. "You're running this show, Joe," Carter said. "You say when we go."

"We'll go now," January said, checking his watch. "The mop-up squads will follow right behind us." In both directions, the railroad tunnel seemed full of men. Overhead, on the surface, January knew other men were taking up their places. A complete corridor was being thrown around this spot.

Squad cars and ambulances were ready, 'copters were hovering overhead.

Once they had located the hiding place of the Brain, it had been possible to plan decisive action.

No human being could escape from this spot. Those who tried would be held for rigorous examination, and if they were slaves of the Brain, they would be hospitalized.

January picked up his hat, which he had removed while donning the gas mask, tossed it into the opening. No shot came. He climbed up.

Ahead, at the intersection of the passages, he saw two machine guns, the gunner slumped down over the weapons.

"Come on," he called to the men behind him.

They came. Something else came too. A *penth*!

At the sight of the ball of blackness, his flesh crawled. This, he knew, was it. He lifted the little weapon he held.

Atkinson's weapon. This was the only name they had for it. The weapon that Atkinson had invented and that Wishwell had perfected in the nick of time. The weapon that had stopped the *penth* that Howe had brought into the sub basement of the Federal Building. Would it stop this *penth* as it had stopped the other one?

The *penth* moved toward him.

Atkinson's weapon flared with its beam of intolerable brilliance. Violet light shot outward.

The *penth* tried to dodge, tried to come on, tried to lift above the beam, tried to duck below it. For an instant, the light weapon and the blob of darkness fenced like two swordsmen in some fantastic duel. Facing the beam of violet light, the *penth* began to moan. It was in pain and the pain was voiced as a shrill whine which protested against this intolerable beam of light, wailing that the light hurt it.

January enjoyed that whine of pain. He remembered how Atkinson had screamed, how Lorton had begged for mercy. Lorton had got what was coming to him but Atkinson had been a gentle, kindly old man, whose one thought had been research with the ultimate goal of improving the lot of the human race. Atkinson had gotten no mercy. So far as January was concerned, no *penth* from the Crystal Brain was going to get any mercy from him.

Abruptly the whine died. The *penth* vanished. Whether it had been destroyed or whether it had returned to the Brain in the subdimensional transit that was the normal mode of travel of these creatures, January could not tell. All he knew was that it was gone.

At the moment, nothing else mattered. Atkinson's weapon had held up, had won a victory. January and every other man here had bet their lives on that weapon.

BEHIND him, Blackstone, Wishwell, and Carter were scrambling up into the passage. Behind them were the mop-up squads, organized like an army, with everything from fighters to stretcher-bearers to take care of any casualties, also to begin the task of hurrying the slaves out of this place of horror to hospitals where they could secure treatment to release them from their bondage.

"Let's go," January said.

They moved forward.

Where the connecting passages met, machine gun slugs filled the air again. They waited while the gas gun was brought up. When the guns were silent, they went forward again.

"There's a girl here," January spoke to the leader of the first mop-up squad. "Before you bother with anybody else, try to find her."

"I'll do my best."

Although January didn't know it

then, the girl who was here had saved his life the instant he passed the corner. It was on this spot that the ray weapon had been focused.

They reached the big chamber in front of the room that housed the Brain. Here, among the slaves, Mike slept quietly over his machine gun. The wrinkled face of the little chimpanzee man indicated he was enjoying this sleep, perhaps for the first time in years. Here, also, they saw the ray weapon that had been improvised.

They hadn't seen another *penth*.

"I don't like it," Carter muttered. "I don't like it a little."

Neither did January. But he didn't say anything.

Ahead was the heavy steel door blocking the way to the room of the Crystal Brain. Behind steel and concrete, the Brain seemed secure.

"Bring up the cutting torches," January ordered.

On the run, a squad of men moved forward. They brought with them the most advanced cutting equipment, torches that would cut through tungsten steel as if it was butter.

The steel door was attacked.

"Indians!" Blackstone yelled. "Look out!"

As the cutting torches began to eat into the door, the air suddenly boiled with *penth*s. They came from nowhere, blurring as they sprang into existence, black balls of nothingness, hissing their anger and their defiance. No human being had ever defied them before. Some of the men facing them now had run from them once.

But ran no longer! They would run once, but they came of a fighting breed, and they would not run twice.

The Brain hurled forth its entire force of demons.

Beams of violet light flashed up to meet them. *Penth*s twisted, evaded, squirmed, wailed that death was a horrible thing, slid into nothingness to

dodge the torturing light, emerged again from nothingness and kept coming.

Members of the mop-up squads, armed with Atkinson's light weapon, moved up quickly to join the fight around the steel door.

The first *penth* victory was scored against a mop-up squad man. His light weapon failed.

He screamed. A split second later, he had ceased to exist.

The second man screamed. A *penth* had gotten in under his guard and had wiped him out of existence.

The third man did not scream. Simply ceasing to exist, he did not have time to energize his vocal chords.

Out of the corner of his eyes, January caught a glimpse of the third man vanishing. Not for the first time, but perhaps for the hundredth time, it occurred to him that they were not going to win this fight.

"Hurry up with that door!" he shouted.

"We're going as fast as we can," a torch man answered.

THE TOUGH steel did not run like butter. As the minutes passed and the *penth*s hissed in undiminished numbers, coming out of nothingness and dodging back into it almost too fast for the eye to follow, more and more Joe January began to realize that the winning of this fight depended on their getting through that steel door.

Once through the door, he had something in his pocket that would smash the Crystal Brain. With the Brain gone, the *penth*s either would not exist or would be without control.

Wishwell, Carter, Blackstone, and January stood back to back, protecting themselves and the men with the cutting torches.

"We can't take much more of this," Carter gasped.

He spoke truer than he knew. A *penth*, materializing at floor level, struck upward before the FSB chief could lower the light weapon. Striking upward, the *penth* wiped Carter out of existence as one wipes a mark from a slate with a wet sponge.

With a crash, the steel door went down.

Cold air puffed out. Inside January caught a glimpse of the Crystal Brain squatting under its cloud of blackness, heard a continuous clicking of relays so loud it was almost a roar.

From his coat pocket, January lifted the hand grenade he had brought along for this moment, if the moment ever arrived. It had arrived. He pulled the firing pin with his teeth, tossed the grenade into the room of the Brain, shouted two words.

"One side!"

The torchmen were already moving back and away. Blackstone, January, and Wishwell moved with them, protecting them from the darting *penth*s that came and went like balls of black lightning.

The grenade exploded in a flash of flame and a thundering burst of sound. Beneath their feet, the concrete floor jumped. Came the tinkle of breaking plastic, like the crash of window panes breaking and the glass breaking as it fell to the sidewalk. January found himself holding his breath waiting not for a new sound but for the absence of an old one.

There was a split second of silence. Men and *penth*s alike seemed to be holding their breath, waiting.

The absence of sound came. January sighed. The relays were silent. This was the silence he had been waiting to hear, the silence that told him the Brain had been smashed.

"It's a goner, it's done," he heard his own voice say. Inside he was aware of a tremendous surge of psychic re-

lief. The cursed Brain was smashed, finished, done. In this one instance, at least, something that all scientists seemed to fear had ceased to exist.

At the same moment when he realized the relays were silent and the Brain smashed, he also realized that something else was wrong. He needed a second to grasp where the wrongness lay. Then he got it. The *penths* ought to have disappeared. When the Brain ceased to function they should either have gone out of existence or they should have begun to drift aimlessly. Now that the Brain was gone, nothing was directing, was it?

But they hadn't disappeared.

They weren't drifting out of control.

Very subtly their movements had changed when the Brain was smashed. They were no longer appearing and disappearing. They seemed to remain continuously in existence. Their speed was perhaps a little slower but they were still very much present.

Present enough to strike down and destroy a mop-up man who had momentarily relaxed his guard.

And—at the sight, January's heart climbed up in his throat and threatened to choke him—out of the room of the shattered Crystal Brain was coming—the great grand-daddy of all the *penths* that had ever existed!

BESIDE HIM he heard Blackstone choke and gulp. "Hell's out for noon sure. Here comes the devil himself to see what we've been doing to his little demons."

The ball that came out of the room of the Brain was at least three feet in diameter. It swirled, sluggishly, with an ugly blackness. It was the same darkness that had squatted over the top of the Crystal Brain.

In this moment Joe January realized what Nancy Howe had said earlier, that it was not the Brain itself that was their enemy, it was this creature of

darkness, this thing, this alien, this whatever it was.

A man named Michaelson had invented the Crystal Brain. January had finally learned about Michaelson, that eccentric genius who was perhaps the world's foremost authority on digital calculators, on mechanical brains. Men had been forced to invent brains to aid in solving the mathematical problems which a mechanical brain could solve in a few hours but which would take a man years to solve.

Michaelson had gone farther than anyone else in this field. He had created the Crystal Brain. The network of relays behind the panels were the controls, the memory, the storage tanks for the information that was housed and integrated in the Brain itself. The Brain had been his life's work. This had been his secret laboratory where he had worked for years. Here he had created the Brain.

And something else had taken over the operation of his invention. Squatting on top of the Brain, this something else controlled it, worked through it.

In this frozen moment Joe January tried to think what this something else might be. He knew it was life, some form of life hitherto unknown on earth, unless, perhaps, it was the life-form that the Druid priests had worshipped and tried to evoke in the circle of gigantic stones at Stonehenge, that the priests of the upper Nile had sensed existed, and had named the Lord of the Underworld. Perhaps neither of these ideas were right. Joe January didn't really think they were. He thought this thing, this alien, was actually a creature of far-distant interstellar space that had wandered earthward and had discovered in Michaelson's Crystal Brain the tool it needed to contact, and control, the inhabitants of this planet.

All scientists had seemed to sense

this thing, or something like it, might exist, and that their probing telescopes would someday discover it. They had been afraid they might find this thing.

Whatever it was—it *was*!

It came floating out of the room of the Brain as high as a man's head. Wordless signals seemed to flash from it, signals that the *penths* understood and obeyed. Instantly every *penth* in the room flashed toward the ball, disappeared into it, blending their substance with it.

As the *penths* disappeared into it, it grew larger.

As he saw the *penths* vanish and the ball of blackness enlarge, January realized at last that the *penths* were not products of the Brain, they were products of this alien, they were part of it, sum and substance identical with it, parts of its body that it detached and sent to do its bidding. Perhaps the control of the distant *penths* was made more effective through the radio signals that flowed out from the Brain and out from the big transmitter in this room, but the *penths* were never creatures of the Brain.

They were bits of this body of this alien creature.

It hung in the air before them, blacker than midnight, hissing with the threat of a thousand cobras.

It moved toward them.

PANIC HIT the men in the room.

Here was something they had never seen before and had never imagined. Here was the devil himself come up out of darkest hell to devour them. Somewhere a man yelled, a sound ripped from a throat in the depths of mortal terror. "Knock that fool down," January said.

It was Blackstone who leaped and struck the panic-stricken man as he started to run. If one had run, others would have run too. If you stop the first one, you may stop all of them.

January stood his ground. He could feel sweat pouring out of him in leprous patches. Cold from the ball of blackness washed over him. He knew only one thing—he wasn't going to run.

He lifted the light weapon.

"This one is for you, Atkinson," he whispered, and pressed the trigger.

Out shot the flare of violet light.

The ball of darkness flinched. Whatever it was, the violet light hurt it.

The room seemed to blaze with blinding brilliance as men leaped to stand beside January, to join him in pouring the hated violet radiation into the grand-daddy of all *penths*.

For a second, it kept coming. Then it flinched and tried to draw away. Given an instant, perhaps it would have succeeded in dematerializing itself as did the *penths*. But it didn't have that instant. It didn't have any time whatsoever.

Suddenly, while the lights poured into it, it began to fall apart.

The room moaned with sound. Something that had come from interstellar space was wailing that now it would never again reach its far-off home, that in its wanderings it had run across a race that had seemed to be pygmies, little creatures of no importance.

Only they weren't pygmies. They were giants. They were prepared to hold their world against all *penths*. They were destroying this one.

The darkness broke apart, seemed to run like oil, flowed, felt for the first time the grip of gravity, and began to flow downward like a wet spray of falling oil.

It lost all coherence, all resemblance to a ball. With the loss of form, the moan went into silence.

Still the lights beat into it.

Like tiny bits of carbon black, it fell to the floor. It left there only an oily smudge of nothingness.

It was gone.

In the room there was not a single sound. No man breathed, no man moved, no man whispered. Each of them knew in his secret heart that here the human race had come up against one of the horrors of hell's far distant spaces, and had emerged triumphant.

Joe January sat down on the floor. It seemed to him he no longer had the strength to stand. Around him men were beginning to move and to talk, blabbering questions, wanting to know what that thing had been, where it had come from, how it had worked. Let 'em blabber, he thought. They'll work it out to their own satisfaction,

they'll think of something. He hardly heard them.

Running footsteps sounded. He looked up. A girl stood there. Her lips moved. "Joe. Joe January." He hardly heard her, hardly remembered that she existed. Who was she?

Then, as he remembered where and under what circumstances he had first met and talked to her—presuming that a whispered conversation in the dark counted as talk—he remembered who she was. His fingers went into the pocket of his coat seeking a cigarette. And little by little, a grin began to form on his face.

THE END

THE VESTAL ATTACK

BY

RAMSEY SINCLAIR

SANDY Macpherson was a mild man. Nothing ever seemed to ruffle him and he didn't care about anything but his beloved engines. His father had been an engineer on an English freighter and his father's father before him had worked the early reciprocating engines on a Clyde-built steamer. So Sandy was in the right tradition. To him, a sweet-purring rocket motor was the zenith of living.

The freighter *Vestal* was built in 1980 and its engines were the crudest sort of rockets with none of the Schlacht refinements which came twenty years later. Yet Sandy lived close to them, and somehow coaxed power from them. Old and battered they might be, but they looked as if they'd come out of the shops. Sandy, back on Tellus often supervised the relining of the tubes, a job usually handled by the yardmaster; he was so afraid the job wouldn't be done right. In light of this build-up it is easy to see why he behaved as he did when the pirates jumped the *Vestal*, three million miles from the Martian port of Clomal.

They locked to the *Vestal*, blanked her radar with a power pulse, and were through a lock and aboard before the captain of *Vestal* knew what had happened. He was fully aware though of what they wanted. The leader of the little band of eight men gestured menacingly with his blaster:

"All right, grampa," he snarled, "let's have the medicinals." He grinned evilly. "We know where to unload them at a mighty nice profit."

"Sandy, the engineer stowed them" Captain Fance answered levelly. "See him."

And that's where the pirate made his mistake. Leaving his men to watch the few cowering crewmen, and the captain, he

went aft toward the engine-room. He swung open the bulkhead door and stepped through, his blaster in his hand.

Now Sandy had just finished cleaning a feed motor and was in the process of bolting it back on its mount. But when he saw the strange man, the glittering weapon, and the general air of hostility, he didn't have to guess what had happened. Medicinals are more priceless than jewels throughout the system.

"O.K. Sandy," the pirate leader said. "Cut the horsing around and lead me to the medicinals—and I'll put these out of commission—" and with that he let four blast-shots go from his weapon, turning the neat wiring and piping of the engine room into a shambles of twisted metal and filling it with nauseous vapors.

Probably Sandy wouldn't have done a thing but lead the man to the stowage of medicinals—but those four withering bolts of electrical energy were too much...

The wrench, still held in his hand, suddenly became an unerring projectile. The stupefied pirate never knew what converted his head into a pulpy mass, but Sandy knew the damage that could be done by ten pounds of fast-flung steel.

His lips tight-set, Sandy picked up the blaster and cautiously made his way to the control room. There is no need to relate the rest. In five seconds, that room was a bloody, stinking, shambles...

They gave Sandy a decoration for that and the company wanted to transfer him to a new ship, but he insisted that as long as the *Vestal* cut ether, he was going to mind her engines. Maybe when they retired the ship—O.K. but until then, Sandy Macpherson was going to nurse his rockets...

THE DOUBLE-CROSS

BY

CHARLES RECOUR

CAPTAIN Phillip Magruder lit a cigarette and waited for a moment in the corridor. The soft whine of the gynos purred through the huge freighter and the young officer felt the content that comes from a ship well handled.

He paused before opening the doorway to the after engine compartment—and then his hand froze on the handle—clearly through the thin metal of the bulkhead, he recognized a voice—and his hair stood on end with what it was saying.

"...Magruder's a fool, I tell you. He's got better'n four million credits in *sinthar* locked in his cabin, and the idiot will deliver just like he's supposed to. Now I say we should cop the stuff, divvy it up among the eight of us—that's a lot of money—and blow with one of the life-boats. We can hit Jupiter or one of the satellites. He can't chase us, that's for sure—and by the time he gets a Service Patrol after us, we'll be safe in a dozen hideaways till the stink blows over. Jimmy, you wreck the radio—O.K.? Now let's get this straight..."

Magruder didn't wait to hear more. On catfeet he left the mutineers. This matter was serious. His brain raced like a rocket as he figured a way to foil the madmen. Only they weren't mad. They could very well get away with their little stunt. What a freak of fate that he'd overheard!

He shot for his cabin. Quickly he opened the safe and removed the metal box containing the powerful drug. He opened it, and transferred the glass cylinders of powder, faintly fluorescent, to a cardboard box which he stuffed with cloth. He dropped the box into a waste disposal barrel, and returned the empty metal box to the safe.

The control room radio equipment was untouched. He switched off the monitor and spoke breathlessly into the microphone. It was a moment to contact Base Three and lay out the plot. "We'll have a patrol ship

out in five hours, Captain," the Commander informed him. "Sit tight and let them go through with their trick—no use getting yourself killed. If they should spot the deception, turn the drug over to them. They won't get away."

Magruder returned to his cabin.

An hour later he was aroused by a pounding on the door. Feigning sleepiness, Magruder let in the intruder. It was Clinton. The ugly engineer, heavy-faced and sullen, held a blaster in his hand.

"We want the *sinthar*, Magruder. Give us the combination."

"You'll never get away with it," Magruder said steadily.

Under the gun barrel, Magruder opened the safe and Clinton reached in, taking the metal box.

"Now try and send a message, Captain," Clinton said evilly, "Frain smashed your transmitter."

Helplessly Magruder watched them pile into a lifeboat. The little vessel left the mother-ship and soon became a pin-point. Calmly he checked over the control panel and saw that all the locks were secure.

An hour later, he heard the bang of metal against metal. The mutineers had uncovered the deception. Just in case, he picked up a blaster. They'd try to force entry though there was little hope of their making it. Sure enough, in minutes, a half-dozen suited men appeared at the port using sledges and blasters against the steel-hard quartzite—without avail.

The futile effort kept up for an hour, when the mutineers realized that by now they wouldn't be far enough away from a patrol. Again the little boat vanished.

An hour and a half later, Magruder let in the patrol officers. In their wake trailed a motley group of beaten men. "These yours?" the officer asked, "seems they thought they were going somewhere..."

MEGAWATTER

BY S. G. LONG

WITH RADAR, FM and TV occupying the stage these days, you don't often hear about the good old-fashioned type of radio transmitter which operates on low frequencies. But they're still in existence. Low frequency stations are work-horses which are extremely reliable. They work over any distances dependant upon their power, and in all sorts of weather, regardless of any interference, including sun-spots which play such havoc with short wave high-frequency stations. As a consequence of this reliability, long range communications use long waves.

The U.S. Navy is going to build the biggest low frequency transmitter in the world.

It will be located in Washington—the state—and will be used for communications across the North Pacific Ocean. And it will be a monster. They're going to feed a million watts into it! Hitherto, two or three hundred thousand watts was regarded as a gigantic transmitter. But this one's taking a megawatt!

In direct contrast with the tiny antennas of the TV stations the antenna of this job will literally cover square miles of area, consisting of huge steel cables strung in mid-air over valleys and from mountain peak to mountain peak. No radio transmitting station in the world can compare in power or size with this proposed giant.



Suddenly the strain reached the breaking point, and screams tore from his throat.

If this Be Utopia . . .

By Kris Neville

**The State, trying to fashion a world
in which mankind need not fear the future,
created Utopia — where everyone was afraid!**

“‘**L**O, SUE.”
He shuffled papers
without looking up.
“You’re late.”

He had half seen her, out of the corner of his eye, when she came into the office.

She didn’t answer; he looked up, annoyed.

The room was empty.

It took a full minute for him to steady himself after that. Even after his mind was calm, his heart still fluttered wildly. He stared at the desk top. He remembered, quite clearly now that he thought of it, that Sue *had* come in. But at her regular time. He had sent her over to Johnson with the production figures on the Calton case; she would be gone all morning. And yet, it seemed that, just a moment ago, she—

He shrugged and hazarded a laugh that didn’t quite come off.

His left eye was twitching again. A distressing nervous tic he had first noticed three months ago. It was getting worse.

Nerves.

And now—hallucinations.

His morning was shot.

He looked at his watch; he looked at the unread reports, some left over

from yesterday. He wanted to scream.

HE WALKED into Wilson’s Bar and sat down. Alcohol relaxed him, and when he was relaxed, the tic went away.

No sooner had he adjusted his bulk to the stool than he knew that he had made a mistake. The bartender was eyeing him with obvious disapproval. He should have gone somewhere else. Too late now. Nothing to do but brazen it out.

He flipped the card across the bar.

The bartender took it, inspected it closely, turned it over, read the stamp on the reverse side. “This is a new one.”

“Yes, yes, of course. Issued yesterday.”

The bartender laid the card down and glared across the bar. “Mr. Morrison, I don’t want to seem nosey, but—You came in here yesterday. You drank. You got your last punch. Now, you come in with a new card. How come? That ain’t right, and you know it ain’t. I couldn’t get a new card, not for anything.”

Mr. Morrison cleared his throat; he was afraid his left eye was going to start twitching again. “I—I got it from Department A. I’ve been overworking

lately. My duties are quite heavy."

The bartender glanced at the wall clock; it was still an hour until lunch. "Humph," he said emphatically. "I overwork. I don't get no over-rations. Not for liquor or anything. Especially not for liquor. And I don't get off no hour before dinner."

Mr. Morrison wasn't accustomed to that tone of voice; under other circumstances, he would have taken the man's number and lodged a Class 11a complaint immediately. That he did not now was due solely to the fact that the new card wasn't really authorized by Department A, and the publicity involved in an appearance at a job transfer hearing would look bad on his master record.

He tried to outstare the bartender and felt his left eye twitch. "There are worse jobs than this," he threatened. And the bartender's eyes wavered. "A rye-high," Mr. Morrison ordered crisply.

The bartender reached out for the card, punched it. "Yes, sir."

Mr. Morrison nodded to himself. Mentally he filed away a reminder to do something about this man; just what, he would figure out later.

The drink came. He gulped it, picked up his ration card and stalked out.

He would have to be careful, in the future, never to drink up over one card at any one place...

That damn tic. Symptomatic. He was worried, definitely worried. Maybe they would call him before a review board; maybe they would recondition him; maybe they would say he was losing his grip—

And transfer him!

Mr. Morrison went cold at the thought.

A job like this—Consultant for Production Management of Eastern District—wasn't easy to get. It repre-

sented the labor of years; years of—

And to lose it just because of that damn tic!

He needed a drink. Bad.

BY THREE o'clock Mr. Morrison was pleasantly drunk. He sat on a bar stool with his tenth rye-high before him.

He told himself that, in another couple of hours, he would have to leave. The white-collars would be coming around to sit huddled over their drinks, nursing them along. Then at six-thirty the bartenders would chase them out, and they would trudge home to their uninspired meals. Then the workers would arrive; rough, uncouth, rowdy people.

Mr. Morrison shuddered.

He decided it was a shame—a very great shame and a public disgrace—to give the workers a liquor ration. But to give them an *equal* ration (not that men of ability and position couldn't subvert the law) was really carrying things a little beyond all reason.

The person on the stool next to him was leaning over.

"You're getting drunk," the person said. "You're getting *drunk*. You got enough rations to get *drunk*!"

Mr. Morrison knew it was time to leave. He got up from the stool and moved, on unsteady legs, to the door.

He hailed a cab, fumbled for his transportation card—the blue one—found it. Mr. Morrison got in the cab, wondering why people like Mr. Morrison didn't get just one card—good for everything.

"SUE, I'll want you for dictation most of the day."

"Yes, Mr. Morrison."

He studied his thumb nail. "I'm afraid I'm a little behind on my paper work. You see, yesterday I—I had to

see a man." Mr. Morrison realized that it sounded pretty lame.

"Yes, sir. When I came back from Mr. Johnson's office you were gone. So I said to myself, 'Now Sue,' I said, 'what would Mr. Morrison want you to do?' so I took out the Miner's file—you remember, you told me to check it for that missing report on June production when I had time—and I—"

Her voice, Mr. Morrison realized for the first time, was thin and altogether unpleasant.

"Very good, Sue," he interrupted.

"Yes, sir, but I—"

"Never mind, Sue. Another time."

"Yes, Mr. Morrison."

Mr. Morrison elevated his eyes; he focused them to her left. He didn't want to look directly at her. "We really must get on with the dictation."

She crossed the room to her chair before the steno; she sat down, looking crisp and efficient.

All at once, Mr. Morrison didn't know where to start. There was so much to be done. In desperation, he snatched the top report and began to read it savagely.

The hangover, it filled his stomach with butterflies, and he couldn't concentrate on the words. His mind was vacant.

He cleared his throat—that usually helped. He fixed his eyes determinedly on the heading.

"Inter-departmental memo. To Jacoby."

The keys clicked harshly on the steno.

"It has been brought to my attention that report—uh—" His eyes skipped frantically, searching for the file number. . . . Ah, there it was, right where it should be. . . . "uh—your file—You better put that in parentheses. Sue—your file 739.82—No, on second thought, don't put any parentheses."

He felt his hands growing moist.

Should there be parentheses? He shook himself. Tried to tell himself that it didn't matter.

But it did. Mistakes (even little mistakes) count against you on the efficiency files. You can't be too careful.

He cleared his throat the second time.

There it was: the tic again.

He winced. Had Sue noticed?

He sprang out of the chair and turned his back on her. He resumed dictation.

"Report number so-and-so, dealing with decreased efficiency in Factory Seven."

Factory Seven?

Oh, God! He remembered, now. He was supposed to inspect it. This afternoon. At two.

The reports would have to wait.

No. The reports *couldn't* wait. He was already behind schedule. Too far behind.

"What? What did you say, Sue?"

"I said I wish you wouldn't face the wall like that, Mr. Morrison. It makes it sound like your mouth is all full of mush. It makes it awful hard to copy you."

"Oh. . . . Of course."

If he turned around, she would be sure to notice the tic.

He glanced down. His hand was shaking.

"Sue. Will you run out and—uh—get me some tobacco."

"Yes, sir. May I have your card?"

He didn't turn around.

"Use an official ration form," he snapped irritably.

Silence a moment. Then: "Certainly, Mr. Morrison."

He heard her heels clip-clop sharply on the bare floor; he heard the door close.

He turned around.

He was weak.

He sank into his chair and tried to

relax his taut muscles.

His efficiency rating was down, and he knew it. That meant they would be calling him in, any day now, for a check up. He twisted his mouth bitterly. How could they expect a man to—?

It was the pressure, he decided. The eternal pressure. The eternal fear of losing a point on your job rating index and getting a transfer. The certain knowledge that you are being watched, your every mistake noted down on the balance sheet. The insecurity.

Even an iron man couldn't stand it.

Mr. Morrison looked at the reports and sighed.

There would be another twenty years of it. God! twenty years. And even then— He wondered if he could believe the State propaganda about the new retirement program. In twenty years, when he was ready, maybe by then. But twenty more years of it, God! Twenty more years.

He checked his thoughts; lately he had a tendency to let them wool-gather. That was bad; it interfered with his work.

He looked over at the production chart on the wall; followed its downward swoop with his eyes. Off a point and a half, this month.

He envied the men in Distribution. Distribution was functioning smoothly, as usual. When there was anything to distribute.

Production lousy. Men weren't working like they used to, before the New State.

The new incentive plan.... hmmm.... It was getting some consideration in Central Planning. He disapproved of it. No sense in pampering the workers. *Keep after them*, he told himself. *No slackers*.

There he went. He had to gather up his thoughts again. He cursed inwardly.

His eyes drifted back to the papers

on his desk. He wondered if he could duck out before Sue got back; get a couple of quick ones before time to inspect Number Seven.

No. He *had* to keep at it. Once you get behind—

Absently he took out his pipe and loaded it. He lit it and let it go out. His left eye was still jerking.

THE FACTORY was a riot of noise.

It didn't help his throbbing head. He nodded absently in answer to the foreman's question and walked on to the next machine.

The female operator took her foot off the pedal and looked up. She was sweating.

Mr. Morrison reached over and picked up one of the helical coils and examined the knots. He turned the coil over in his hand.

It was hot in here.

He put the coil back in the rack and turned to the female.

"How do you like your job?" He had to half shout to make his voice carry above the pounding of the machines.

Her eyes were dull. Her lips half formed a word, and then she thought better of it. "It's my assignment. It's what I'm best fitted for," she said.

Mr. Morrison nodded. "A good answer."

He moved on.

At the next machine, the operator wiped damp hair back out of her face and looked up. Mr. Morrison studied her features. Well moulded.

Her lips drew together in a tight, thin line.

Mr. Morrison felt his face getting red. The female thought he had winked at her. And she didn't like it.

She was mad. Boiling mad. He could see that.

She said something that was lost in the roar.

Mr. Morrison knew that he should move on. He could see trouble coming if he stayed. An argument.

"How do you like your job?" he asked.

"I hate every damn minute of it, you fat leech!" she screamed above the roar of the machines.

Mr. Morrison winced.

"Now, now," he placated "After all, the assignment—"

She sputtered something else.

Mr. Morrison turned to the foreman.

"A discipline case!" the foreman shrieked above the noise.

Mr. Morrison eyed the female and nodded gravely.

She was coming around the machine, fast. She placed herself squarely in front of him.

"I work, see! Ten hours a day! Hard, see! And then some fat, ugly slob comes around to leer at me! Some fat slob that's got an office, comes around to wink at me—"

He felt very ineffectual. He wanted to explain that he couldn't help the tic; that it was involuntary.

"Here, here, really—you aren't being quite. . . ."

"How do I like my job?" he asks.

"That's a laugh! 'How do I like my job?' he says. Listen, mister," she reached out and hooked a greasy hand in his lapel, "you can take this job and—"

LATER, in the foreman's office, Mr. Morrison was once again master of the situation. He leaned back in the comfortable chair and clasped his hands together.

"How many discipline cases do you have, like that poor female?" he asked.

The foreman stood up and crossed to the steel filing cabinet. "I have the certified list here." He rummaged among papers and finally came up

with a crisp, new sheet. He carried it over to Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Morrison read it. "Seven. I see." He ran his finger down the list. "Hummmmm. What about that man—uh, I believe—uh—number 314? Why isn't he on this?"

The foreman looked up. "Oh. Him. He's a good worker. Today was just his bad day. After all, the machine could have fouled up on anyone."

"But he *deliberately* jammed it with that coil!"

The foreman shook his head. "It just seemed that way. When the guide lane broke, it twisted the coil out of his hand. It was the effect you saw, not the cause."

Mr. Morrison pursed his lips white-ly. "You must realize that 'a bad day' is no excuse. If we permitted that sort of thing, you know, pretty soon every Tom, Dick and Harry—" He let his voice trail away significantly. He took out his pen and unscrewed the cap.

"But, sir: He's no discipline problem!"

Mr. Morrison fitted the cap over the end of his pen. The point touched paper. "Maybe so, maybe not. That's my job. He will serve as an example to the rest. After all, we must consider the Whole."

He wrote "314" on the paper.

"I'll get these approved for reassignment. I'll fix it so you can appear at the transfer hearing by proxy under the 'due cause from direct overseer' section."

He continued to talk, half to himself. "There are some vacancies in the Eastern Fields, and I received a requisition for three men and a woman, this morning, to report at the deep mines in the North."

He looked up.

"You may alert these eight people for transfer." He extended the pen. "Now, if you'll just sign right here,

we'll have all this unpleasant business over and done with."

MR. MORRISON was glad to be home. He took off his clothes and showered; he made a conscious process of washing the grime of the factory off his body. When he had toweled dry, he slipped into his lounging robe and went into the front room.

It was a pretty room; tastefully done. The last occupant—poor fellow—had been very cultured; in addition, he had had a way of wrangling extra requisitions through Distributions.

Take this phono, now. Properly speaking, you should find one like it only in an A2 job-rated house. Mr. Morrison was lucky.

All at once his mood changed.

He stood up and began to pace the room.

It was a small room. Funny he'd never noticed before just how small it really was. So small that it oppressed him.

And it wasn't a very pretty room, either. No, it was a cramped, stultifying rabbit warren.

And he wasn't really lucky.

He was unlucky.

It was the workers who were lucky. They always had the best of it. You never saw one of them with a nervous tic. Not that their homes were like this—couldn't expect it, of course—but after they put in their ten or twelve hours a day, they were through. Free.

Men like Mr. Morrison weren't. Their work day didn't end at the office. When they left there, they brought their jobs home with them. To worry over....

Mr. Morrison looked down at his shiny black shoes.

Nervous strain.

He might as well face it. Too much responsibility. Too much pressure.

He should see a doctor. He was afraid to. A doctor would have to report it if there was anything wrong. And then it would go on his index. They would put it down in ink and never erase it. It would always be there.

Still. They would find him out sooner or later. The signs were all there. He knew them as well as the next man. Decreased efficiency. Irritability. Procrastination. Excessive concern over petty details. Fear. Day dreaming.

It was bad. He was cracking up. The tic in his left eye. The hallucination yesterday morning. The argument with Keller last week.

That damn tic; having it was worse than working twelve hours straight, every day, in the pits. Anybody that saw it could tell you were on your way down.

He let his thoughts drift in self pity.

He had crossed the room and threw himself on the sofa. He fidgeted....

Had he done everything all right, today? At least he had caught up on the reports. At least he had done that much.

He reviewed the day.

There was the case of 314. He was sorry about that, now. Too late, of course. Nothing could be done about it.

Not that he minded making an example, now and then. It was necessary. And far more satisfactory than all the "incentive plans" in the world. But that sort of thing could be over done.

Mr. Morrison was not too sure that he hadn't been over doing it. The last three months.

Maybe it was another symptom of nervous strain. A tendency to be less than lenient with the faults in others, realizing, subconsciously, your own. A sort of self punishment.

Mr. Morrison did not care to pur-

sue that line of reasoning any further.

Mr. Morrison settled back on the decorative pillow.

He wasn't going to be able to sleep again tonight!

Mr. Morrison wanted to scream. He couldn't explain it. He just wanted to scream.

He screamed.

MR. MORRISON was very conscious of the hammering of his heart; and equally aware that there was nothing he could do about it.

Sure he was nervous. Even a little frightened. But who wouldn't be? He tried to pacify himself by repeating the old bromide, "A hundred years from now it won't make the least difference," and, as always, he failed.

He felt like a little boy waiting for the doctor.

Mr. Haskins had come in fifteen minutes ago, stalked through the room without even looking at him, and entered his office. He should be finished reading the sheaf of reports any minute now.

The chair on which Mr. Morrison sat was uncomfortable. He fumbled out his pipe.

Mr. Haskins was the board review officer for cases involving A and B rated personnel. He took transcripts of transfer hearings and rendered the decisions. A very competent man. Used to be a practicing psychiatrist, Mr. Morrison understood.

It hadn't been too bad, the hearing. Not nearly as bad as he had expected. Everyone had been very kindly and sympathetic, intent only on getting the facts and getting them straight.

Mr. Morrison wouldn't be overly surprised if he got a six months recovery leave. He would like that. Perhaps he could get a priority to Hawaii. Spend four months in the sun; no worries at all. Come back relaxed.

Of course that was up to Mr. Haskins. Whatever his disposition, it would be final—but it was difficult to see how it could be anything more severe than a transfer to class C rating. That, at the very worst. Which wouldn't be too bad. Less responsibility.

Mr. Morrison lit his pipe. He smiled wanly at the empty room.

He centered his attention on the uncurtained window. Outside, it was spring. Mr. Morrison liked spring. He liked to hear the birds chirping and to feel the faint, warm wind on his face. Mr. Morrison wondered how spring in Hawaii felt.

The door opened.

"Come in, please, Mr. Morrison."

Mr. Morrison sprang erect. He looked around for a place to tap out the pipe dottle, saw none, dropped the pipe into his side pocket. Automatically he adjusted the knot of his tie and squared his shoulders. But his step was almost reluctant.

The receptionist stepped aside to let him enter and closed the door after him.

MR. HASKINS was seated behind a huge oak desk. He looked up. "Ah," he said. "Come here."

Mr. Morrison advanced across the carpet and stopped before the desk.

Mr. Haskins didn't offer him a chair. That was a good sign; the interview would be short; just long enough to clear up a few minor points.

For a long moment Mr. Haskins studied him in silence, pursing and unpursing his lips, speculatively. Mr. Morrison squirmed.

"Morrison, uh?" Mr. Haskins grunted.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Haskins looked down at his desk.

"Your number 37-533-338?"

"Yes, sir."

"This your case, then."

Mr. Haskins built a pyramid with his hands by putting the finger tips together, palms facing each other. He was wearing a pair of loose, white gloves. He looked down at his hands, relaxed them, and let them drop below the level of the desk top, out of Mr. Morrison's range of vision.

"Understand you created quite a disturbance last week. Screaming in your apartment."

Mr. Morrison turned red and stammered out a weak, "Yes, sir."

"What made you do it?" His voice was like a whip lash.

Mr. Morrison flinched. He made movements with his hands, expressive of his confusion and embarrassment. "I—that is, sir, you see—overwork and—"

"Speak up, man! Can't you speak sentences?"

"No, sir. . . . I mean, yes, sir. . . . I mean, it's overwork. I'm not quite myself."

He winked at Mr. Haskins.

That made him want to turn and run.

Mr. Haskins threw back his head, narrowed his eyes and snorted. He got up, walked deliberately across the room, and then whirled around. He stood planted firmly there, legs apart, hands behind his back, neck thrust forward, staring fixedly at Mr. Morrison.

"I'm going to ask questions. Expect concise answers. . . . Now, how long ago did you first notice the. . . ."

IT WAS over. He had never spent a more terrible hour and a half in his life. Mr. Hawkins had been like a big, enraged bull. Thank God it was over.

Mr. Morrison was clammy with dried sweat.

He tried to steel his shattered

nerves. He had been too optimistic all along. This might even result in a transfer down to a class D. Back to his old job, filing clerk in Maintenance. . . . But he could stand that. He'd been class D before. He was still young, fairly young. And in another ten years or so he would work his way back up to B1 again. . . . If Mr. Hawkins didn't static check his records—"not recommended for future promotion".

If that damn pipe hadn't burned a hole in his pants, and if that damn tic hadn't—May as well forget it.

Mr. Morrison wanted to go home and go to bed, try to sleep, drown the whole ordeal in sleep.

But Mr. Haskins had told him to wait out here. He'd been waiting nearly half an hour.

Finally a Security man entered the room from the street door. He eyed Mr. Morrison queerly for a moment and then crossed to Mr. Haskins' private door and went in.

Within two minutes he was back, carrying a typewritten slip. He consulted it.

"You Morrison?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Morrison felt a tightness around his heart and a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. The skin over his back bone crawled.

"You're to come with me."

Mr. Morrison stood up. He was numb. He rubbed the palms of his hands on his pants. He gulped. "Could you—tell me why?"

The Security man's eyes clouded briefly. With pity?

"No," he said. "They'll tell you at Central."

Shock. It hit him like a hammer between the eyes. The room swayed before him. His knees were weak.

He felt the Security man's hand under his elbow, steadying him, forc-

ing him, gently, toward the door.

He couldn't believe it. He *wouldn't* believe it. He felt sick at the stomach.

Good God—

He had been declared of no further value to the State or to himself.

That slip was an euthanasia authorization!

MR. HASKINS opened the top desk drawer and took out his bottle. He poured himself a stiff shot, drank it at one gulp. He put the bottle back.

Too bad. About that chap. Morrison.

He leaned back and tried to relax.

He looked at the desk clock. It would be all over by now. Too late

to do anything about it.

It worried him, though.

Not that he minded making an example out of somebody, now and then. Kept the rest on their toes.

But maybe he had been over doing it lately.

Maybe it was another symptom of nervous strain. A tendency to be less than lenient with the faults of others, seeing them, subconsciously, in yourself. A sort of masochism by extension.

He looked down at his gloved hand. He could feel the muscles leading to his right thumb. They were jerking spasmodically.

TAILORED METALS

BY

H. R. STANTON

THE UNSUNG heroes of the modern scientific world are the metallurgists. All the kudos go to the esoteric nuclear physicists, to the rocket engineers and to thousands of others who delve into the mysteries of things.

But the progress of modern science is strangely dependant upon a small but growing important group of individuals, the metallurgists. For what they are doing, in a large measure determines just how rapidly we will advance scientifically.

Everyone is waiting to go to the moon—but one of the major drawbacks, is the need for metals which will stand up under the terrific heat and pressures which exist in a rocket motor. The metallurgists are seeking out the proper alloys.

The jet-planes of today are due to a great extent to the discovery of heat-resisting alloys. Strange blends of metals are combined in the fiery crucibles of the

foundries, to emerge in shining billets to be used in motors and machines.

Tools for our modern high production world are due directly to the metallurgists. They were amateurs compared with the skilled metal-blenders of today.

A trivial example of what can be done with metals is shown by an astounding nail which has recently been invented. It seems that in the steel mills it is desirable to "tag" heavy beams and billets of metal so that track of them can be kept. Certain chalks were used to mark an identifying number on their sides. But in the process these marks were rubbed off.

So the metallurgists sought out and found an alloy of tremendous hardness—and toughness. So now they just make nails of this heat-treated alloy, pound them into the slab of steel and tie a tag on them!

Watch the metallurgical labs—from them will come some amazing discoveries.

THE CURSE OF TUT

BY WILLIAM KARNEY

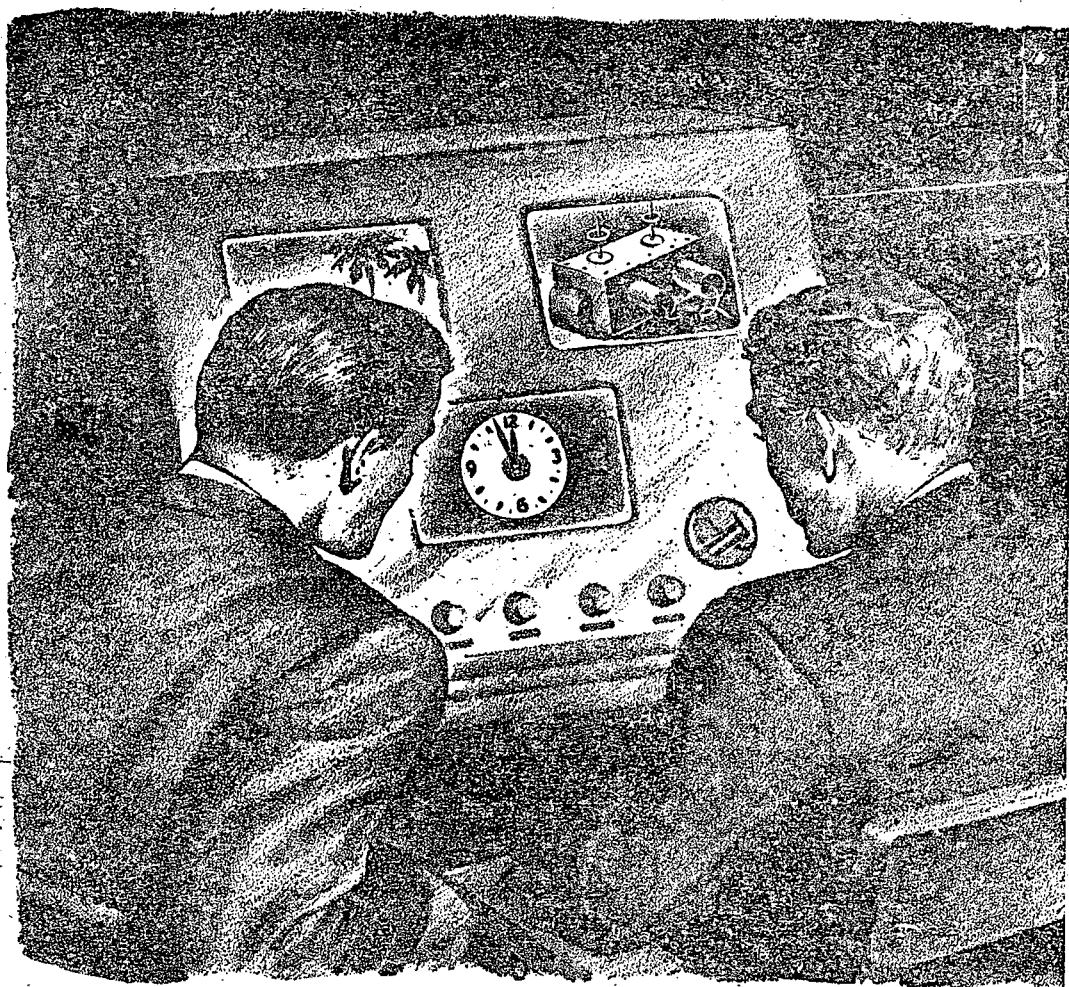
THE LEGEND of "Tut's Tomb" is still with us. Those hardy scientists who violated the tomb of King Tut-ank-ammon, and who endured the curse placed upon it are for the most part gone.

Recently one of the few survivors of that great expedition back in nineteen twenty-two, voiced his last opinion on the curse. He said that there was no such thing, that the deaths of those concerned with opening the tomb, were purely natural and that superstition played no part.

Be that as it may, the fact is that the majority of people responsible for the

opening of that treasure house of Egyptian antiquities, died within a comparatively short time. No really rational explanation was given for many of the deaths. Hence the legend—if it may be called that—lives on. We are not prone to agree with either side of such an argument, yet it is impossible not to realize that some things defy the most reasonable of minds.

Maybe there is no truth at all to the Tut-ank-ammon legend. Maybe it is sheer superstition. Maybe it is the pure fancy of some playful inscription reader. Maybe . . . but they died!



The LOST BOMB

By Rog Phillips

When the ultimate in atom bombs failed to go off, no one realized a con man was at fault!

ON THE day that the test explosion of the Super Bomb was scheduled at a far off Pacific island site, Horace Quinley critically

inspected his scholarly beard in the bathroom mirror of his temporary home and headquarters in Cranby, Oklahoma. He nodded in satisfaction



They waited, almost without breathing; while the seconds ticked away

at what the mirror showed him. Even the most shrewd of his—er—potential partners would never suspect he was other than a conservative old professor.

As he left the bathroom to go to the breakfast his daughter, Ann Quinley, was preparing (judging from the combination of odors and aromas coming from the kitchen), at that very moment Dr. Reynard H. Temple, four thousand three hundred and twenty-eight miles away, nodded his head to the waiting navy personnel, signifying that the tiny clock within

the master controls of the bomb was now ticking off the time toward the moment when the controls would detonate into mechanical action which would end in the atomic explosion.

Horace stepped briskly into the kitchen, his whiskers vibrating hungrily, totally unaware of the existence of Dr. Temple and his Super Bomb, which was now ticking away with no one interested in sticking around to listen to those ticks.

As he crossed the rubber tile floor and planted a fatherly kiss on Ann's cheek, then sat down in the cheery

breakfast nook, the last of the navy launches cast off from the shore of that distant Pacific isle, its powerful motors throatily plucking at each wave and shoving it sternward, as it joined its fellow launches in the orderly retreat to the horizon where the spread-out fleet of Operation S.A.B. looked like lice on a fine hair.

"Here you are, dad," Ann Quinley said, placing a plate of bacon and eggs on the table in front of his thin chest and just under the rounded point of his beard.

The toast popped up as she returned with the sulkily snarling percolator. She leaned a hip against the edge of the table and let the coffee pour from the percolator into her father's cup in a rich brown, steaming stream, and looked at him fondly.

"Watch out there, honey pot," he said suddenly. "My cup's running over."

They sopped up the spilled coffee together, their hands getting in one-another's way. Then he patted her cheek with a damp hand that left coffee streaks.

"You should wake up mornings," he said sternly.

She looked at the twinkle in his eyes and made a face at him. After filling her own cup she took the percolator back to the stove and returned with her own plate.

When she sat down, the sun, quite a few millions miles away, sent in light through the breakfast-nook windows and lit up the red print design on her housedress and the rich brown depths of her hair; and a bird sitting saucily three feet outside the window on a fragile bush sent in its song to light up the clear blue depths of her eyes.

And if the far off Pacific the launch bearing Dr. Temple was half way from the island to the thirty-five

thousand ton battleship on whose deck his fellow atom scientists stood watching.

"I'm expecting some visitors today, Ann," Horace Quinley said casually half way through the meal. "When they come send them out to the workshop."

"Who are they?" Ann asked, interested.

"Just Appleby, who owns the bank; Godlove, who owns the mill; and MacGregor, who owns the fuel yard," Horace said. "And if they ask you any questions, just say you're sure I can answer them much better."

"All right, father," Ann said.

Horace Quinley looked at his daughter sharply under bushy gray eyebrows. When she called him "father" it was because she didn't approve of something.

AS HORACE D. QUINLEY left the house by the back door and crossed the weed-strewn yard to the one story building of hollow-tile construction he called his workshop, Dr. Reynard H. Temple climbed the rope ladder from the launch to the deck of the battleship.

The other half dozen atom experts were looking at him anxiously. He smiled reassuringly at them.

"Everything should be all right," he said. "I thoroughly tested the coordinating mechanism before the Bomb elements were set in their places. Everything functioned as it should. It's just a question of time now." He glanced at his watch, his eyes overly mature and wise for their thirty years. "Two hours and approximately twenty-seven minutes."

An orderly came up briskly.

"The captain is awaiting his breakfast until you join him, sir," he said.

"Tell him I'll be right with him," Rey said, smiling in a very civilian

manner at the orderly. He turned to the other scientists. "Have you had your breakfasts?" he asked.

"The invitation is for all of you," the orderly said quickly. "You were the only one I hadn't had the opportunity to—"

"Oh, I see," Rey said. "Why don't the rest of you go on up? I'll be there as soon as I change and wash up. Ten minutes should do it."

When he stepped into the officers' dining room fifteen minutes later there was no sound except that of an audible ticking that came from one of three television sets on an otherwise empty table against one wall.

On the screen of the set from which the ticking sound came was the face of a clock. It was the clock on the control panel on the island. Its hands pointed to two hours and eleven minutes before zero.

The screen of the set next to it showed the entire bomb assembly. The third screen showed the island from a distance of a mile and a half. The scene, in color, was beautiful. The island lay flat, tall palms swaying lazily under the influence of an ocean breeze, the sky an azure blue with here and there a filmy white cloud. The ocean was blue-green, with lazy swells advancing toward the sandy beach which appeared to be just a white line separating the sea from the greenery at the bases of the palms.

"I see the television technicians did their work well," Rey said, taking his place at the table.

No one answered his remark. The ticking of the clock continued, dramatic in its monotonous monopolization that made even the walls seem to listen.

"Almost too well," the captain suddenly interrupted the ticking sound. "The suspense will kill me before the bomb explodes!"

There was a murmur of polite laughter. Doors opened and uniformed figures came in with trays of food.

"I hope we're far enough away," one of the scientists worried. "I know we're safe from the radiation, here just below the horizon. But what about flying debris? That Super Bomb has ten times the amount of fissionable material that any other bomb has had. More, it should be more efficient. The explosion may reach the equivalence of a hundred of the Hiroshima type bombs."

"Stop worrying," another scientist said in tolerant good humor, attacking his corned beef hash. "This ship could withstand almost anything. Anyway, the tidal wave will probably wash over us and clean off the dirt that lands on us."

There was another wave of polite laughter at this remark. Then silence settled once again, disturbed only by the eating of the scientists and the captain, and the monotonous ticking of the clock in the radio, amplified sinisterly.

Each of the men in the room ate slowly, conscious of the desire to make as much time pass as possible before having to sit back over the final cup of coffee.

"I would say this is probably the most important day in history," the captain said thoughtfully, as though inviting argument.

HORACE QUINLEY patted the smooth surface of the machine affectionately. It was quite an impressive thing in its way. It was intended to be.

The assembly was set on a platform of solid concrete that rose from the floor in the center of the workshop. It consisted of three—really four—distinct units. Two of them were unremarkable, being merely a five-horse

generator and a five-horse induction motor coupled together.

The other two were the remarkable parts of the setup. One of these consisted mainly of two spirals shaped to fit the bottom half of an imaginary sphere. One spiral was of ordinary resistance wire such as is found in any hotplate. The other was made of two copper tubes, one inside the other, separated by a thick coating of insulating paint that also served as a binder.

It had cost Horace Quinley fifty dollars to get this double copper tube made and shaped the way he wanted it, but it had to serve the double function of being impressive looking while doing absolutely nothing at all.

The two spirals, one of number eighteen German silver wire, the other of copper tubing with an outer diameter of a half inch, fitted together into the imaginary spherical surface so that the strand of resistance wire was sandwiched in between successive turns of the tubing. They were held in their proper positions and shape by a framework of molded ceramic bars.

The ends of both spiral coils were connected to wires leading to the control panel fastened by brackets to the generator.

This unit, four feet across at the top, was held in a frame of glistening plastic over the fourth, the key unit, of the whole setup.

The key unit, to put it bluntly, was the visible half of a transformer whose other half was buried out of sight in the concrete base.

However, it was not designed to hint at being a part of a transformer. Its coil was of flat copper stripping wound in helices and held in clamps. These helices were around a central bar, four inches square, whose center was of laminated transformer iron, and whose outer surface was of glis-

tening black bakelite.

The transformer core did not go into the concrete. It stopped a quarter of an inch from doing that, its blunt ends resting directly over the blunt ends of the continuation of the transformer core under the concrete.

Leads went from the impressive flat helices to the generator-motor setup, and to the control panel.

There were five neatly painted signs fastened to the parts of the machine. They read, from right to left: motor, generator, control panel, energy converter, and cosmic lens.

On the control panel was a hook, on which hung an extension cord. Horace Quinley, looking very much the scientist with his spare frame in a neat brown suit and his well-trimmed white beard hiding his features, the better to accentuate his high forehead, took the extension cord off the hook and plugged it into a wall outlet.

This done, he went back to the panel and threw in a knife switch. The resistance wire spiral in the cosmic lens heated to the glowing point, lighting up the sandwiched copper spiral quite scientifically.

Next, he threw in a second knife switch. An impressive relay switch at the top center of the control panel threw violently, shaking the panel. Immediately the motor-generator began to turn over, gaining speed rapidly until its sound was a high whine.

Then he pulled the extension cord from the wall outlet and coiled it up on the control panel. The cosmic lens continued to glow impressively. The motor-generator units continued to whine powerfully. A voltmeter on the control panel continued to point to two hundred and twenty volts. An ammeter continued to point to a little over four amperes.

Though the power for this impressive array came from the primary of

the split transformer, hidden in the concrete base of the assembly, there was no visible indication of this. A wooden yardstick leaned against the wall nearby for the express purpose of being passed under everything by anyone suspicious of the genuineness of the COSMIC ENERGY CONVERTER.

Horace Quinley stood back and surveyed his creation proudly. He rubbed his bony hands together in high satisfaction at what he saw.

"I would say this is probably the most important day of my life," he said thoughtfully, as though defying the Fates to attempt to argue the point with him.

THERE WAS deep silence in the Officers' Mess, dominated by the quiet ticking from television unit number one, whose screen showed the fatal control clock, its three hands converging on Zero. The hour hand was there. The second hand reached it and swept on past with small, evenly spaced jumps. The minute hand was a mere two minutes away.

Dr. Reynard H. Temple swallowed dryly.

"It's coming," a voice said, filled with awe. "No power on earth can stop it now."

Another voice started to chuckle and stopped abruptly. Feet shifted with scraping noises.

On screen two the Super Bomb squatted in its frame with horribly sinister and menacing motionlessness. On screen three the green waves washed up onto the white sands of the beach under the swaying green palms reaching yearningly into the deep blue sky across which drifted lazy white billows of clouds.

The eyes of the captain and the scientists flicked feverishly from one screen to another, trying to hold the

images of all three in the mind simultaneously.

On the exposed decks of the battleship there was not a soul. The thick coatings of peelable paint glistened desertedly. The sound of waves beating against the sides of the ship found no ears to hear it.

Below decks at a dozen different points were similar television sets bringing the same three views of what was about to happen. Eyes hung tensely on the minute hand as it moved imperceptibly past the last mark before Zero, then fascinatedly on the slender second hand as it swept for the last time around the dial, dominating the scene at last, a player on a stage from which all other players have been swept for the last, dramatic moment.

It reached the bottom of the dial, the half way mark on its pilgrimage toward Destiny. It started up, while from the loudspeaker came the monotonous ticking, slow, deliberate, not loud yet beating sharply, demandingly, inexorably.

It was ten seconds away. It was the only thing in existence. Its movements were slow, deliberate. At each stopping for the next tick that would send it on, it vibrated ever so slightly. Almost erect now, its movement was that of a perfect soldier, marching with precision in every step toward the two grosser hands that pointed dumbly to Zero.

The Universe stood still, breathless, as it quivered before its last, its final jump. It seemed almost to suspect that its next step would be the end as it was blotted out of existence in the twinkling of an eye. It seemed to draw back, to struggle. Then it was there, its slim length bisecting the Zero.

The ticking stopped.

There was a whirring sound, coming from the middle television unit. On

the screen a pointer on the bomb case swung from S to F and stopped.

For an interminable instant minds froze. The green waves in screen three coasted lazily toward the white line that divided the ocean from the palm trees that reached into the undisturbed sky.

"Oh Lord!" It was more a groan than words that escaped Rey Temple's lips.

"This is horrible!" the man who had worried about the effects of the explosion exclaimed.

"It's impossible!" a mathematician corrected. "I checked all the calculations myself. The bomb *had* to explode!"

The Super Bomb squatted motionless in screen two, the white pointer pointing in silent, but nevertheless potent drama at a white F—a scene no one should have been able to see for in the very instant it assumed that position it should have been transformed into incandescent gases by the almost incalculable release of energy in the explosion.

"Look!" It was the captain's voice, excited. The scientists looked at him. His extended finger pointed toward the third screen. All eyes turned to it.

At first everything seemed unchanged, yet different. Slowly detailed differences filtered into the mind. The white line produced by the sandy beach was not white, but green. The blue-green ocean waters were bright blue. The stately palm trees were not green, but a sickly yellow. The white clouds were a pale blue. And the sky itself was almost a blue-black.

"Oh it's just something wrong with the radio!" a voice exclaimed.

"No." It was Rey Temple, his voice carrying firm conviction. "*Something* has happened."

"**M**ORNING, JIM," Clarence Godlove, owner of the largest of the two mills in Cranby, said to the portly man behind the desk at the front of the bank.

"Morning, Clarence," Jim Appleby, president and two-thirds owner of the bank replied, rising.

The two men left the bank and entered the expensive sedan. Clarence Godlove guided the car down Main Street slowly, turned left toward the tracks and George MacGregor's fuel yard. At the rather timeworn small office building of the fuel company Clarence Godlove pressed the horn button twice, briefly.

George MacGregor came out immediately, still in the process of putting on his suit coat. He climbed into the back seat.

"Morning, Jim, Clarence," he said gravely.

Clarence Godlove made a U turn back to Main Street, turned right for three blocks, then left toward the edge of town. He drove carefully. He should. His car held the owners of ninety percent of the bank's capital stock, the fuel yard, and the largest mill, not to mention a fair share of the rest of the industry and real estate of Cranby, Oklahoma, population fourteen hundred, center of a very lush farming community.

None of the three were talkers. Each was busy with his own thoughts, happily dwelling on the more than bright prospect of getting in on the ground floor of the greatest scientific advance of the age, greater than the Atom, even.

This was the day. They were on their way to see the demonstration of the Cosmic Energy Converter.

They were indeed lucky that Professor Horace D. Quinley had chosen Cranby as the town he retired to to complete his life-long research into

the secrets of cosmic energy.

The quiet old professor had moved to town just six months before, rented a house that the bank owned, built his workshop, and had then rapidly brought into material reality the theories he had played with on paper during his long and successful career as a professor of physics in some eastern university. It was all so hush-hush that he even refused to disclose which university.

But, as professor Quinley so wisely had remarked, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, not the bakery label. Today they would see energy produced in usable form from what had always been thought to be nothing—or the professor would frankly confess failure.

Clarence Godlove brought his car soundlessly to a halt at the curb in front of Professor Quinley's house. The three financial powers emerged from the car. The car doors slammed softly.

They strode up the walk to the porch. The professor's daughter, a very attractive young lady named Ann (Mrs. Quinley had died when the poor girl was in her early teens and she had had to assume the responsibilities of raising herself and also taking care of her absent-minded father), greeted them at the front door with a self-conscious but nevertheless welcoming smile.

"Father is back in his workshop," she said. "He's expecting you."

"Fine. Fine," Jim Appleby said heartily. The three men took off their hats in the presence of a lady, bowed themselves off the porch, and made their way around the house to the back.

"Wonderful girl," George Macgregor said humbly.

"Mighty fine young lady," Clarence Godlove agreed sincerely.

Horace D. Quinley saw them come around the corner of the house from his vantage point behind a dust-coated window in his workshop. He rubbed his hands together greedily and went to the door.

Clarence Godlove knocked discretely. When the door opened to reveal Horace's quivering beard and eager eyes, the three men entered in single file, like three head of cattle quietly and unsuspectingly entering the butchering lane at a stockyard.

Inside, they paused, their eyes on the very scientific looking collection of machines and things glistening at them from the concrete base in the center of the floor.

"There it is, gentlemen," Horace Quinley said quietly. "I have already given it a trial this morning—and it works just as my calculations based on my theories said it would. I'm ready to prove it to you."

AS HORACE QUINLEY beamed benignly at his three prospective financial backers beside his Cosmic Energy Converter in his workshop in Cranby Oklahoma, in the faroff Pacific Rey Temple's statement, "*Something* has happened," struck the dazed minds of the others in the Officers' Mess with dramatic emphasis. He saw this, and elaborated his statement.

"If you'll stop and think," he said, "you know that nothing that could go wrong with color television would effect the picture just this way."

"But it must be the television," a voice objected. "The bomb didn't go off."

The light in Rey's eyes weakened. He glanced at the intact Super Bomb in the middle screen and nodded.

"That's true," he said. "The bomb didn't explode. Impossible as it is, it didn't. That raises a question though. Just what are we going to do? No

provisions were made in the construction of the bomb to return things to a safe state, and there's ten times the minimum critical mass of fissionable stuff there now, and no way of knowing when it will suddenly burst into action."

"Since there's been no explosion," the captain spoke up, "let's go on deck and look."

The suggestion met with unanimous approval. There was a scraping of chairs as they all rose and left the room.

On deck they saw a startling confirmation of Rey's assertion that *something* had happened. So tenuous that it was almost not visible, a giant hemisphere of blueness rested on the water, with the distant island as its center.

Clouds seen through this blue haze appeared a light blue. Those above were their usual whiteness.

The scientists were instantly excited. Their voices as they discussed this strange phenomenon were crisp and business-like.

In short order instruments were brought out. Spectrographs of the blue haze were made.

Within half an hour there was definite data. The blue haze was caused by a certain complex oxygen ion, seldom found except in the laboratory and in the upper stratosphere near the poles where the Northern Lights originated.

The blueness in the haze area was explained. It was understood. What was not understood was what produced it.

The bomb had definitely not exploded. Yet immediately after the moment it was supposed to have exploded an area of oxygen ionization, spherical in shape and centering on the Super Bomb, had come into existence!

The recording geiger counters on deck showed no least sign of radioactivity in the haze. Yet *something* had to be there, producing that ionization!

As they watched, expressions of baffled puzzlement on their faces, it seemed that the haze was rising slowly upward.

"There's something that must be done immediately," Rey Temple said grimly. "A volunteer suicide squad must go to the island and examine what has happened. One of us must go, with a few men to assist. I'll be the one to go."

"No," several voices murmured half-heartedly. "You are the most important of us. You invented this bomb. You should stay behind so you can learn what went wrong."

"That's all the more reason why I should go," Rey said. "It's my job."

Twenty minutes later Rey Temple and ten officers and seamen headed toward the distant island in a power launch. Hundreds of white faces watched them go. Everyone knew it was more than probable they would never come back.

"There's no use being afraid of our job," Rey was saying as the launch sped over the waves. "If we're to die there's nothing to stop it. It might come any minute—or it won't come at all. So forget the danger and enjoy yourselves."

"Why not?" a freckle-faced seaman said, grinning.

From then on there was no tension. A lump rose in Rey's throat at the bravery and sensibleness of the men with him.

The island drew nearer and nearer. They couldn't tell when they entered the blue haze. Close at hand it was too tenuous to see, and if there was any effect on them from it it wasn't consciously noticeable.

But to those watching on board the battleship the point at which the launch entered the mystery area was sharply defined. To them it was a tense moment, and the fact that nothing apparently happened to those on the launch did little to relieve the tension. That blue haze was evidence of the presence of something completely unknown. Anything could happen. At any instant.

"IN ORDER to start the Cosmic Energy Converter," Horace Quinley said in his conception of the best classroom manner he was supposed to have acquired during his years of mythical teaching in an eastern university, "I must use a little of the quite ordinary house current."

He took the coiled extension off its hook on the control panel and plugged it into the wall outlet. In a moment the resistance wire spiral was glowing nicely, its light reflecting reddishly from the fat copper tubing spiraling with it in the cosmic lens.

"After the energy converter has tapped onto the cosmic energy through the now operating cosmic lens," he went on, "I can start the motor-generator. Then it uses electricity from the generator, and I can unplug the extension from the house current."

He threw the knife switch that activated the large relay. It threw over with an impressive bang. The motor-generator began to turn over, gaining speed until it whined at full speed.

"Now," Horace said. He pulled the extension cord out of the wall outlet and coiled it up. "You see," he said, "it is now running under power tapped from the Cosmos itself. The limitless source of all energy. It's inexhaustible!"

He studied the faces of the three men. They were obviously very much impressed.

"As you can see for yourselves," Horace said, picking up the yardstick and passing it under the units, "there are no other connections with outside sources of energy. There is nothing but the bolts that fasten the machinery to the base."

The three men bent down and looked under the motor and generator. They studied the energy converter in particular, nodding, convinced that there could be no outside source of power.

There was no way they could know that the impressive energy converter was merely the secondary of a transformer whose primary was buried in the concrete base, and that the true source of power was two wires that ran underground from the workshop to a nearby power pole, and were connected to the light wires there.

Horace had even anticipated an examination of his light meter and light bill. It would show nothing of this extra power being used in this fake setup. He even directed their attention to this now.

"As a further check that I am not using outside power," he said, "you can look at my light meter on the back porch. It will not show any heavy use of electricity such as this motor must be using now."

"Could this," Jim Appleby asked cautiously, "be used to provide power for the whole town? If it can, we could dispense with the huge coal consumption of our present plant." He sensed George MacGregor's frown. "Our financing of this," he went on hastily, "would net us far more in the long run than your profit from the coal the city uses, George."

George MacGregor's face cleared instantly.

"It can be used not only to provide power for the city," Horace said, "but also to provide unlimited power

for the whole area, for the whole country. This is the beginning of a New Age in power. We will reap millions."

The three men nodded gravely. Then they looked at one another in secret questioning, seeming satisfied at what they saw.

"Uh—" Jim Appleby cleared his throat firmly to indicate he would take over from here. "Have you thought of your future plans, Professor Quinley? This will take quite a bit of financing, no doubt. The three of us can raise quite a bit of capital—and there's no need of bringing more into this than is absolutely necessary."

He looked at George MacGregor and Clarence Godlove. Those two nodded their approval of his statement.

"Well—" Horace chuckled in quite a convincing self-consciousness. "I have thought a little on it. Of course, having spent considerable time studying patent and marketing procedure along with my science—the practical application—I am fairly sure of myself on those matters. I—ah—feel fairly safe in saying it will take no more money than can be raised among you three." He smiled at their smug expressions. They were hooked.

"How much do you think it would take—to start with?" Jim Appleby said.

"Uh—" Horace said, hedging. "How much can you raise?"

ANN QUINLEY busied herself washing dishes and tidying up the house. As she worked she hummed to herself, occasionally bursting into song. But now and then she sobered, her unquenchable good spirits somewhat dampened by worry.

It wasn't serious worry. She had no correct idea of the perfidious nature of her lovable father. From her ear-

liest infancy she had adored him. It was impossible for her to conceive of him as an unscrupulous crook. He had protected her from his schemes too well for her to be otherwise.

On occasion when he had had to leave some place in a hurry to escape the clutches of irate victims and/or the law, she had never been aware that it was more than a sudden urge to travel that possessed him.

When her mother was alive she had been too young to understand their frequent quarrels and what they were about. When her mother had died she became too busy. Horace was a home lover. He liked to have his breakfast ready for him when he entered the kitchen. He liked to have her around in a housedress.

She was totally unaware that to the successive string of victims of her father's machinations she was a symbol, an obvious symbol, of honesty and integrity. The final touch that opened their pocket books.

No, it wasn't any of this that lay at the foundations of her worry. Nor was it the lies she had had to play along with, perfectly innocent lies to her, that her father was a retired university professor. He had always liked to put on a big front, making people think he was somebody. Harmless, making him just a lovable humbug to her.

It was the device in the workshop that worried her. It was machinery, and her father didn't know much about machinery. Where just talk was concerned he was tops. He could carry off his humbuggery admirably then. But with machinery he might give himself away. It would be a terrible blow to his ego to have others—especially nice men like the bank president and those other two—see through him.

It would be quite horrible for those

three men to find out he knew little of machines and practically nothing of science. If they found out he wasn't a retired professor, but just plain Horace Quinley, ex-salesman, ex-everything-under-the-sun-but-a-professor, it would deflate his ego so much they would have to give up this nice house and move to some other town again.

A knock at the front door interrupted her work and her motherly worrying about her father. She went to answer it.

"Good morning, ma'm," the young man at the door said, taking off his cap.

He had looked at her vaguely, embarrassed. Now as he looked at her his eyes widened in a way that sent thrills through her. She smiled at him, noting his tanned handsomeness, his honest eyes, more accustomed to humor than serious things. He seemed about twenty-three or-four.

"I'm sorry to bother you ma'm," he went on. "I'm with the electric company. We've been tracing a power leakage, and I—that is—" He stopped.

"Won't you come in?" Ann invited. "I know you'd like a cup of coffee. There's still some left from breakfast."

"Well—" He hesitated.

"Please," Ann said. "My father is back in his workshop and can't be disturbed just now. Maybe by the time you've had some coffee he'll come in the house."

"Your father?" the young man said. He looked at Ann's left hand. She, sensing the meaning of his glance, raised her left hand to casually arrange her hair, exposing her ringless fingers.

"Why yes—ma'm," he said. "I'd be glad to."

His eyes followed Ann's trim figure as she heated the coffee and set out

two cups and saucers.

"My," Ann said chattily, "it's certainly lonesome in a small town. Dad and I have been here only a few months, and haven't made many friends yet. Of course, dad has. Right now Mr. Appleby and Mr. Godlove and Mr. MacGregor are in his workshop with him. But I don't have much of a chance to get out. I don't know anyone."

Her eyes twinkled at him. She picked up the rumbling coffee pot and went over to the breakfast nook with it.

"Sit down—ah—" she said, pouring the coffee.

"I'm Harry Shaw," he answered. "Thanks. I will sit down."

"I'm Ann," Ann said, setting the percolator on the stove again.

"Very pleased to make your acquaintance, Ann," Harry said more boldly. "I—I sort of guessed you were from out of town." He hid his face in his coffee cup.

"What made you guess that?" Ann asked innocently.

"They don't grow them as pretty as you around here," Harry said. Then his face turned a deep red.

"It's awfully nice of you to say that, Harry," Ann said quietly, her lashes forming demure fans that covered her eyes.

AS SOON as the navy launch came within leaping distance of the small dock, Rey Temple leaped ashore. There was no use hesitating. There was no use being afraid. In spite of the mysterious blue haze it was obvious that the Super Bomb had not gone off. At any moment it might—but if it did death would be instantaneous. So the only thing to do was forget about the danger and go ahead. First, he reached behind the control panel and cut the wires from the clock. That way, if by some remote

chance it would take only a slight jar to make the clock relay trip, it couldn't possibly detonate the bomb. It was a useless act. He knew that as he did it. The throw arm on the bomb had already moved to fire position. That was proof positive that the clock relay had worked. Still, he cut the wires.

The next move was more dangerous. He gripped the throw arm on the bomb itself and moved it back to safety position. In doing so he nearly lost his balance. It should have been hard to move, because it should have moved several pounds of weight with it. Instead, it moved as if it had no more mass than that in the visible arm itself.

The final move, now, would be to dismantle the bomb itself. While Rey waited for the other men to come up, he walked around the Super Bomb, carefully examining it. Its surface coating of paint was not even scorched. There was not the slightest crack in the steel case. There was nothing unusual.

He looked into the television camera fixed on the bomb and shrugged, to let those on the ship watching him know that he had found nothing yet to explain things.

Now the men were there, some of them white of face, but most of them apparently unconcerned by the apparent danger they were in.

In their minds they had reduced it to a known equation. Here was a dud. It should have gone off, but hadn't. Their job was the dangerous one of rendering the dud ineffective. They might make a mistake and send them all to Kingdom Come, but they were willing to risk that.

To Rey it wasn't so simple. From the moment the bomb had not exploded, theory after theory had formed in his mind. Most prominent of these

was one that there was an upper critical mass over which fissionable material wouldn't explode.

The possibility of an upper critical mass hadn't been thought of before. It had been assumed that above critical mass meant just that. But how else account for the fact that the bomb hadn't exploded?

"We'd better put on the radiation suits," Rey said quietly. "We'll have to take off the covers so I can inspect the insides. I'll do it with mirrors, but there'll be a lot of radiation running loose."

Each man went about his job without talking. There could have been talk. There could have been heroics. Each man was glad none of the others felt such things were necessary.

Only the occasional "Here, take this," betrayed the tension the men were working under. And quickly the covers were free of bolts, ready to lift off.

The men stepped back from the bomb. One of them, in the control cabin of the remote control arm, manipulated the metal arm that seized the handle of the first cover and pulled that cover loose.

The arm laid the cover down gently, then picked up a powerful light and held it over the opening.

First Rey held up a portable geiger counter. It remained silent except for an occasional click—perfectly normal for any spot on earth where there were no radio-actives present.

Rey frowned. The silence of the counter meant nothing. It could be out of order, since it had been here at the time the bomb was supposed to have exploded, and could therefore be out of order.

Next he lifted up a pole with a mirror on it, and held it so he could see the interior of the Super Bomb. What he saw made him gasp.

He dropped the mirror and jumped up, to stick his head inside the bomb case. There was nothing in there.

"Hand me up that counter," he said, reaching down a hand without pulling his head out.

When it was placed in his hand he brought it into the bomb case and turned it this way and that. If there was a single atom of fissionable matter inside the case the geiger counter didn't find it.

The case was empty. Twenty million dollars worth of the Uranium mixture was gone. Vanished. And there was no place it could have possibly gone. Unless—

Key dropped slowly to the ground. His eyes looked upward and outward, questioningly. Had the fissionable material in some way transformed itself into something unknown, that produced the oxygen ionization that resulted in the blue haze? If so, what? How?

THE SOUNDS of Horace Quinley's and his three "partners'" voices rose through the intimate silence that had settled between Harry Shaw and Ann Quinley.

"We'll get to it, and have everything ready by the first of the week, Professor," Jim Appleby, the bank president, said.

"Fine, fine," Horace Quinley's voice answered. "But remember, not a word must leak out. Utmost secrecy is absolutely necessary, or the first thing you know the government will have the streets full of soldiers guarding this thing. Secrecy is the best protection we can have for the present."

The four men passed within view of Harry and Ann through the breakfast nook windows.

"I'd better be going," Harry said. But his eyes rested on Horace's sparse figure and intellectual looking

beard. There was a worried, puzzled light in Harry's eyes.

"But didn't you want to see dad?" Ann asked quickly. "I thought you said something about investigating a leak in our electricity or something."

"It wasn't important," Harry said. "Could I—that is, I'll drop back later about it. There's a dance Saturday night. Would you like to go?"

"I think it would be nice, Harry," Ann said.

"I—I hope you won't change your mind," Harry said doubtfully.

"Of course I won't," Ann said. "I'll be ready. And if you are around this way before-then, you'd better drop in for another cup of coffee."

"I'll do that, Ann," Harry said.

He went to the door. On the porch he shook hands self-consciously with Ann and went down the walk to his truck.

"Morning Mr. Appleby; Mr. Godlove, Mr. MacGregor," he greeted the three men climbing into Godlove's car. He also nodded at Horace, a troubled frown on his face.

Horace said his goodbyes to the three men with only half his mind. His eyes were on the electric company truck as it went down the street.

As soon as his guests had gone, he went into the house. He noticed the new light in Ann's eyes and didn't know whether it was good or bad. That is, if the man from the electric company had come for what he thought he had, he didn't know whether it would be feasible to work on him through Ann, or whether it would be impossible to work on him because of Ann. He waited for her to say something about the young man. She didn't.

"That young fellow," he finally said. "What was he doing here?"

"He was working in the neighborhood," Ann said. "He dropped in for

a cup of coffee—and to invite me to a dance Saturday night with him.”

She smiled casually. She wasn't going to tell her father the young man had really come on business, and not just to see her.

“Oh,” Horace said, relieved. “He works for the electric company?”

“Yes,” Ann said. “He's a sort of—I think he said troubleshooter. Sometimes a wire leaks electricity and he goes around and solders up the hole, I think.”

“Oh, he does?” Horace said, frowning. His alarm returned.

He went out the back door and crossed the yard to his workshop. Inside, he placed his ear against the concrete base of his fake cosmic energy converter. Faintly he could hear the low hum from the buried primary coil.

“I guess he didn't find where I've tied onto the power line after all,” he muttered. “Otherwise he would have cut the wires and the primary wouldn't be humming.”

But he didn't stop worrying. The electric company knew there was a leak. If they looked hard they would find it.

“I DON'T know quite what to make of it,” Rey Temple said.

“The mathematics doesn't say anything against mass being converted a hundred percent into energy, Doctor Temple,” one of the other scientists said cautiously. “We've always assumed such a thing wasn't possible, but there were several unknown factors operating in the Super Bomb.”

“More than several, I would say,” another scientist said. “Head on collisions of neutrons, of split nuclei, of neutrons and split nuclei, and no one knows what particles might appear in the process that we don't know about for the simple reason that we can't

explode such a bomb in a cloud chamber to find out.”

“But pure energy!” Rey objected. “It's mathematical fiction. As radiant energy it can be understood, but as a ball of non-material energy whose only manifestation is the ionization of the atmosphere in the space it occupies—what would hold it together? How did it pass through the walls of the bomb without even scorching the paint? And why doesn't it sink into the earth if it is affected by gravity and can pass through solid steel? Or why doesn't it shoot off into space if it isn't affected by gravity? It doesn't make sense!”

The captain had been listening to all this. Now he spoke up.

“If it's pure energy,” he said, “how much energy is it?”

“Incalculable,” Rey Temple said gruffly. “If that Super Bomb had exploded into one hundred percent pure energy, it would have picked up the entire Pacific Ocean, at least, and thrown it into space. Or, more probable, it would have broken the Earth up into several fragments and thrown them in as many different directions.”

“Is there anything to keep it from suddenly doing that now?” the captain asked. “I mean, do you *know* of any reason why it won't—or can't?”

The scientists looked at one another uneasily.

“The truth is, Captain,” Rey said, “that we don't know a blessed thing about it. It's something unforeseen, unexpected, outside of previous experience. All we can do is study the thing and try to learn. Personally, I hope it goes out into space. We would be well rid of it.”

“But if it doesn't?” the captain asked.

“Then we have to keep track of it,” Rey said. “We'll have to watch it night and day. Wherever it goes.”

All eyes turned to the huge ball of blue haze. It had lifted now so that it was completely clear of the island. It hung almost stationary, in complete defiance of the wind which blew through it, plucking tendrils of the haze and carrying them with it, to have them fade out as the unstable ions lost their charge and broke up outside the field.

"You have no idea where or how fast it might go?" the captain asked, his voice unsteady.

"None whatever," Rey said. "I'd suggest you tell the aircraft carrier to have jet planes ready to follow it, if necessary, and prepare the fleet to follow it. Also, I'd suggest you otherwise keep what has happened a secret until we know a little more about it."

Two hours later it had risen almost three miles, still above the island. Planes were kept aloft to observe it, since it was hard to see from below against the background of the blue sky when the clouds cleared, and impossible to see at all when clouds were below it.

To those in the planes it was a magnificent sight. A strong wind was blowing through it, plucking the ionized air and carrying its blue streamers a thousand yards. It appeared to be some giant mane of blue hair, blown by the wind, the head it belonged to completely invisible.

Then it began to move toward the east, slowly at first, so that the ships of the fleet could follow, then faster and faster until only jet planes could keep up with it. It was moving into the wind, its course governed by some mysterious cause independent, apparently, of material forces.

"We'd better notify Washington," Rey said to the captain as the battleship slowed to a halt, giving up the chase. "And I'd like to follow it myself if you can take me over to the

aircraft carrier, and a jet plane is available."

His last words to the captain as he descended the ladder to the launch fifteen minutes later were, "Tell Washington to alert the coast defense network. It may go too fast for us to keep up. We still have to know where it goes."

HARRY SHAW brought his truck to a smooth halt at the curb in front of the electric company office next to the bank. As he climbed out he was whistling. Today was Saturday, and tonight he would take Ann Quinley to the dance. He was happy.

In the private office of Luther Green, his boss and general manager of the city light and power company, his tanned face and clear eyes lost some of their light of happiness. The reason for that was the stern expression on Lute Green's face. And the presence of Mr. Appleby.

"I came right down when I got your call, Mr. Green," Harry said.

"Harry," Luther Green said brusquely. "We aren't exactly satisfied with the way you've been handling your job lately."

"I'm sorry if you feel that way, Lu— Mr. Green," Harry said, shifting his feet uncomfortably. "I try to do my best." His eyes sought Jim Appleby's expressionless countenance, worriedly.

"First of all," Luther Green said, "there's the question of your paying personal calls during working hours. Frankly, I was surprised to hear of it. I didn't think you would do that."

Harry said nothing, waiting for the enumeration of derelictions to come, implied by Lute's emphasis on his "First of all."

"Then there's the matter of your work itself," Luther went on. "It isn't too demanding. Sometimes for days

at a time there really isn't anything for you to do except be ready for work at an instant's notice. Occasionally you have to track down some discrepancy between line meter readings and house meter readings."

"Yes sir," Harry said.

"As I understand it," Luther Green went on, "it's a routine matter. There are from ten to thirty house meters on each pole meter. The total of the house meter readings must come close to the reading of the pole meter, or we know that something's wrong."

"That's right, Mr. Green," Harry admitted.

"And when it doesn't," Luther Green went on, "it's your job to go along the lines and find out where the leakage is. If you can't find someplace where someone has tapped onto the power lines illegally, you are supposed to go to each house and examine the meters. Sometimes people find ways to cut out their meter and reduce their electric bill."

"Yes sir," Harry said vaguely.

"Now we have been very lenient with you in the past," Mr. Green droned on. "There was the case of the Hornsbys who were out of work. We let you have your head on that because, frankly, it saved bookkeeping to let them 'steal' their house current rather than meter it and have the welfare board pay it. There have been other instances where you handed in a false report to protect families whom you had caught stealing electricity, because it was better to let it slide. Once they learned there were pole meters they gave up the idea of getting their housecurrent for nothing."

"Yes, sir," Harry said stiffly. "I know what you're driving at, but I can—"

"Let me finish," Mr. Green said sternly. "For several weeks there has been a mysterious drain on a certain

pole meter that has been unaccounted for. You are supposed to be looking for the cause. While you are supposedly going about your duty of tracking it down, Mr. Appleby discovers you relaxing in a breakfast nook with a young lady, drinking coffee and otherwise enjoying yourself—at the expense of the company. It wouldn't be quite so bad if there were nothing to do at the moment, but no, you have to pick a time when you have definite work to do, and use company gasoline and a company truck to make your social call.

"You've been with us two years now, Harry," Luther Green's voice took on a fatherly tone. "We have great hopes for you. But frankly, any more reports like this, and we will have to seriously question the advisability of finding someone to replace you. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear, Mr. Green," Harry said stiffly. "I'll not let it happen again."

"That's all, then, Harry," Luther Green said expansively. "You may go now."

"Just a minute, Harry," Jim Appleby said. "This disappearance of electricity—I'm interested in that. What have you found out? Do you have any idea where and what it is?"

"I—I'm looking for it, Mr. Appleby," Harry said, dropping his eyes.

"Hmmm," Jim Appleby said, a shrewd light in his eyes. "Well, Lute, I've got to be running along. I'll go out with you, Harry." He went to the door and held it open for the young man, and followed on his heels through the outer office to the street. "Let's go across the street and have a cup of coffee, Harry," he said, disregarding the fact that Harry had just been called down for that very thing of having coffee with people during working hours.

TEN MINUTES later in a booth in the cafe Jim Appleby placed a quarter in the juke box. He despised juke box music, but wanted noise. He puffed on his cigar and waited until the music came on.

"That young lady, Miss Quinley," he said. "She seems a very nice sort, Harry."

"Yes, sir," Harry said, turning red under his tan.

"See her often?" Jim Appleby asked casually.

"No, sir," Harry said. "That is—I just met her that day you saw me. But I like her."

"I see," Jim Appleby said. "You were out looking for that leak?"

"Yes," Harry said. "That's it. I was going to—I knocked, and she invited me in for a cup of coffee. Actually, lots of people do that." He leaned forward, a pleading look on his face. "Lots of people ask me in for a cup of coffee. The way I look at it, people like to be hospitable. If I follow out Mr. Green's orders and turn them down, they're not going to like it. It'll hurt the good will of the company. Why, sometimes I accept when I would rather not. Sometimes when I have to go house to house to look for a current leak, I drink a dozen cups of coffee I don't want, just to be sociable with the people."

Jim Appleby's eyes twinkled.

"Maybe Green was a little harsh on you," he said. "It's my fault. I'll speak to him about it later in the day. But you were looking for that leak, and that's the reason you stopped at Professor Quinley's house?"

"Yes sir," Harry said.

"Then it's along the line he's connected to?" Jim Appleby asked. "Do you have any reason to suspect it's on his line?"

"Not necessarily," Harry said defensively.

"You're as easy to read as an open book, Harry," Jim Appleby said, puffing contentedly on his cigar. "I'd let it go, but I have a very special reason for finding out about it. I want to take you into my confidence on something, but—" He leaned forward across the table in a gesture of man-to-man intimacy. "I want your absolute secrecy on it. No one must know about this."

Harry nodded. Then Jim Appleby proceeded to tell him about the Cosmic Energy Converter.

"This may be the greatest discovery of the age," he concluded. "If it is, incalculable harm could come from it leaking out before we're ready. On the other hand, that mysterious leakage could be due to some kind of crooked work. I don't see how the thing could be faked. But, now that you understand my reasons, do you know of anything you can tell me that might cast a different light on things?"

"Mr. Appleby," Harry Shaw said. "I'm glad you told me all this. I won't say a word about it to anybody; and, although I can't say right now whether Mr. Quinley is crooked or not, not knowing, I promise you that if I discover anything like that I will let you know."

"If you let me down, Harry," Jim Appleby warned, "it might mean that the bank will go broke and ruin a lot of our friends, because this thing is going to take a lot of money."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Appleby," Harry said solemnly. Suddenly he leaned forward. "Look. Could you let me know the next time Professor Quinley is going to demonstrate his invention? If I could know that maybe I could find out something definite enough to talk about."

"I think I can," Appleby said. "MacGregor and Godlove and I are going out there again Monday. I'll get in touch with you before we go." He

stood up. "Drop into the bank Monday morning, Harry."

Harry watched him leave, a troubled light in his eyes. A minute later he left the cafe himself and got into his truck.

DR. REYNARD H. Temple looked forward through the plastic dome of the jetplane. The coast of northern California lay ahead, moving steadily toward him, far below.

His eyes turned back to the blue haze. It was keeping pace with the plane—or rather, the plane was keeping pace with it in its mysterious flight.

The course it was taking wasn't quite as mysterious as it had been at the beginning. It hadn't traveled in a straight line. Its course had varied from northeast to southeast.

Acting as navigator, Rey had charted the course as they went along. It had been roughly the same type of line as could be found on magnetic charts, indicating that the cause of the force field's headlong flight might be related to the magnetic field of the Earth.

That relationship might be a significant one. It tied in with the fact that the strange field ionized the air it passed through. That ionization took considerable energy; but if the energy contained in that strange field were to be used only to ionize air, it would take a million years for it to dissipate.

He had directed the pilot to fly right through the area of the field several times. There had been no effect on the plane, Rey and the pilot, nor on the blue haze itself.

There were other planes. In some of them others of the scientists rode, trying to take measurements with instruments. And other scientists were grimly trying to predict the course of the mystery haze from the data on its previous positions. It was almost

an impossibility; but one prediction had come within ten miles of charting where it would pass over the coast.

According to that chart the thing would strike a mountain peak in California. What would happen then? No one knew.

Now, as the coast came below, with its crooked white strip of breaking waves, the blue haze slowed abruptly and came to a complete stop.

It was as if, now that it had reached America, it had paused, trying to decide what to do next. The jetplanes circled it at a distance of a mile or two.

Other planes came into view from the south. They carried scientists who wished to view the strange phenomenon at first hand. It was impossible for them to believe that there could be such a thing as pure energy that held together as a non-material area. They had come to see for themselves.

Every newcomer was welcome. One of them might learn something that would provide the clue to the future behavior of the thing.

Down below, radio stations were humming back and forth with Washington. The news of the sudden pausing of the blue haze could mean almost anything. It could mean that the land area in some way blocked the thing from going farther. It could mean that some stage had been reached where the thing would do something new—like exploding and destroying the Earth. Or it might never be known what caused it to stop. In another moment it might start up again.

And that was what it finally did. It started up, slowly, with an air of hesitancy. It crept along, its speed varying from fifty to a hundred miles an hour. The jetplanes were forced to circle it. They couldn't stay in the air at such a low speed.

Night came. The fiery luminescence

of the haze caused more than one person to stare up at it questioningly. But when they saw the conventional riding lights of the planes they dismissed it as some new military secret being tested out.

Daylight came again. Time after time the blue ball stopped, seemingly sniffing its way like a dog in a field, sometimes going back along its course, sometimes just wandering aimlessly.

The Saturday evening papers reported a rumor from a very high source that there had been a trial explosion of a new type atomic weapon, and something had gone wrong.

Some local papers in northern California and in Oregon carried reports of a strange ball of blue fire in the sky. Another report from five people who had stopped along the highway said that there had been eleven flying saucers circling slowly, and the blue ball had rotated with them, apparently being some sort of thing originating with them.

HARRY SHAW drove slowly past the Quinley house. It was after dark. There were lights in the windows. The bare bulb on the front porch gleamed, its rays tugging at him in welcome. That light was on for him.

But there was something he had to do first. All day it had preyed on his mind. The professor might be a crook, but Ann Quinley definitely wasn't. Harry was sure of that. If he had stumbled onto her on the street with an armload of money, and the bank burglar alarm was ringing, he would be sure she had picked up the money where the fleeing robbers had dropped it.

Professor Quinley, being Ann's father, made things difficult. All afternoon, Harry had thought, trying to find some way to settle everything so that Ann wouldn't be hurt or have to

leave town in disgrace.

At supper time his inspiration had come. Why not cut the wires and let it go at that? The professor would then know someone was wise to him. It would then be up to him to settle things so that he wouldn't be caught in something crooked.

Harry glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes to nine. It would take only a few minutes to put on his climbers and go up where the wires tied onto the power line. Better still, he could drive his car right up to the pole and stand on the running board, and cut them, taping the ends.

There was no other movement on the street. Harry shut off his lights and drove up over the low curb next to the pole. Five minutes and the job was done. There had been a slight flash when he cut the first wire, indicating that current was definitely being used through these wires.

When he finished taping the bare wires he looked through the trees to the low building behind Quinley's house. There was a light in its windows. It hadn't gone out when he cut the wires. That was a relief. He had been afraid that maybe in cutting the wire he would be cutting off all electricity in the house. That would be a dead giveaway.

Feeling much better about the whole thing, Harry drove to the end of the street and turned around. He sped by the house, went around a block to be headed in the right direction when he stopped in front.

It was nine o'clock on the nose when he rapped on the door. Ann opened it at once.

She was the prettiest girl in the world, Harry thought as he looked at her.

"Hi," she greeted him. "Come in a minute. I want you to meet dad."

"We'd better hurry," Harry said in alarm.

"Nonsense," Ann chided. "No one is ever late to a dance."

She took his arm. He let her lead him inside.

"Sit down and I'll call him," she said. "What's that on your trousers?"

Harry looked down. It was insulation off the wires. He picked it off hastily.

"Guess it must be out of my car," he said.

"And your hands!" Ann chided.

Harry stared guiltily at his fingers. They were dirty from the job he had just done.

"Wash them in the kitchen sink," Ann said. "Dad has some strong hand soap there for that."

He followed her obediently into the kitchen. Ann turned the water on for him, then went to the back door. Harry soaped his hands hastily in an attempt to finish before the professor could come in.

But as Ann opened the door, Professor Quinley came in. There was a dark frown on his face.

"Dad, this is Harry Shaw," Ann said proudly.

Harry, his hands covered with lather, gulped loudly. Horace stared from the lathered hands to the guilty face, his frown deepening into what seemed outright anger.

"Harry had a job to do on his way here," Ann explained. "He had to wash up."

With an effort Horace Quinley smiled. Then, as if at some inner spark of thought, his face cleared and his smile became quite genuine. He winked at Harry and turned to Ann.

"I have to hand it to you, Ann," he said. "You've picked the finest looking young man in town to take you to the dance. Couldn't have done better for you myself."

Ann blushed nicely. Harry began scrubbing his hands industriously. He

rinsed them off. Ann handed him a towel.

"You two look well together," Horace said admiringly.

Against his will Harry felt deeply flattered.

Horace Quinley followed them to the front door. As they went down the porch steps he said, "Stay out as long as you want to. I'll go to bed when I get ready."

AS THEY smiled at him and turned to walk to the car, he frowned.

"So he's guessed," he thought. "It's his way of warning me that he knows. Well, he'd better keep his mouth shut. And he'd better leave those wires alone." He chuckled wisely. "He probably will, too. He won't want Ann getting in trouble."

He waited until Harry's car was out of sight, then went to the street. He found the place where Harry had cut the wires by the light from the distant street lamp.

Returning to the house, he went back with pliers and tape, wearing rubbers over his shoes. He finally had to go back to the house and get an apple box before he could get to the cut wires and join them together.

For the rest of the evening until he went to bed he wore a scowl, nibbling at his lip as he thought of and discarded one idea after another for dealing with this threat that had cropped up. Bribery? Harry looked too noble to fall for that. Threats? Of what? There was nothing he could do—except hope that Harry Shaw was falling for Ann, and would let things ride rather than incur her displeasure. But he was uneasy. When he finally went to bed he didn't sleep.

If only things would hold off until Monday when Appleby gave him the money. Then he could take Ann and get out.

AS HARRY drove along the quiet streets of Cranby his eyes kept straying from the road to Ann. She made a wonderful picture there beside him in his car. She caught his eyes watching her, and smiled at him. Her smile made his heart pound.

At the dance, for three solid hours, he fought a losing battle to monopolize her to himself. It was only as one o'clock drew near that he eliminated his competition.

One o'clock came. The band played "Home Sweet Home". They joined the departing crowd. In the car he started the motor, then looked at Ann.

"There's a nice place to eat out on the highway," he suggested.

"Okay," Ann said, her voice full of trust.

Harry decided he liked that trust. He slipped the car into gear thinking of other girls who tittered and looked at him archly when he suggested the place out on the highway, and their sly, "Should I take my roller skates along?"

He drove with his eyes straight ahead, not talking. When Ann laid her head on his shoulder he looked down at her gently.

"She's like a lonely little kitten," he thought. "And no wonder, with just an old man for company."

They stopped at the highway restaurant. He insisted on ordering steaks. They ate in silence, feeling the discordance of the blaring juke box in contrast to the dance orchestra they had left.

When they returned to the car he pointed its nose away from town, expecting her to object. Instead:

"It's so nice out tonight," Ann said. "I haven't had a chance to see the country since we've been here. We don't have a car."

"Where are you from?" Harry asked conversationally.

"New York," Ann said. "But we've

been all over the country. Dad's traveled ever since I can remember. Before my mother died he was with a carnival. We travelled from town to town, living with the other carnival people in auto trailers." She jumped erect in her seat. "Oh!" she said. "I shouldn't have told you any of that. Dad is—I don't know just how to put it. He likes to impress people. He's always been that way. When we came here he wanted people to think he was a retired university professor. You won't tell anybody? It would make him feel everyone looked down on him if he knew they had learned he's just a bluff."

"Your mother?" Harry said gently. "How did she die?"

"I was only in my early teens then," Ann said. "All I can remember is they took her away in an ambulance. She had taken sick suddenly. The carnival went on without us. Dad was frantic with worry, and when she died he was broken up more than I was about it. Even now sometimes it comes over him. Sometimes I think when he suddenly decides to move away and go someplace else, he's just trying to run away from his loneliness."

She smiled up at Harry, her lips trembling.

His hand left the steering wheel and took hers. There was silence between them as he drove down the highway toward the lights of the next town.

He circled a block and headed back toward Cranby, still holding Ann's hand. Finally she leaned her head on his shoulder again and closed her eyes.

He drove slowly, prolonging the passing minutes. His eyes were troubled.

When, finally, he escorted her to her door, and shook hands clumsily with her when he wanted to kiss her instead, and she leaned toward him to let him, he went back to his car and

drove to the end of the road, turned, and came back slowly. At the power pole he stopped.

There was outright misery in his eyes when he saw that the wires he had cut were joined together again. He left them that way.

Horace Quinley, watching from his bedroom window, saw Harry's car stop at the pole. He waited until Harry had gone. Then he stole noiselessly out to the garage.

"Darn!" he muttered as he flicked the light switch and nothing happened. "Light burned out."

He stepped cautiously across the dark floor. His groping hands encountered the coiled up extension cord on the control panel. With a grunt of satisfaction he went through the much practiced routine of plugging it into the wall outlet.

In a moment the resistance wire spiral became luminous. It reflected from the copper tubing also, giving the whole "cosmic lens" a ghostly appearance. But it threw off enough light so that he could stoop down and place his ear to the concrete base without getting dirty.

A faint hum came to his ear. His eyes lit up with triumph. Harry Shaw had stopped to see if he had connected the wires again—and hadn't cut them this time.

Almost dancing in his joy, Horace left the workshop and returned to his room. It was his nature that, now that he believed his immediate troubles were over, he went to sleep at once.

If he had stayed awake another half hour, he would perhaps have seen the coming of the blue fog.

JOHN GREEN, graveyard engineer at the power plant, saw it come. One instant there was nothing but the dark of night dotted here and there by feeble street lights. The next instant the street lights were barely discernible

two blocks away from where he stood, fifteen feet from the entrance, getting a little fresh air.

That's what he noticed first, that the street lights became obscure. His first thought was that it was a fog, and in a way it was.

But also, things that had been hidden in darkness could now be seen. They stood out eerily. Grass looked almost white. Trees were clusters of intensely white leaves. A billboard half a block away that advertised a soap in large red white and blue blocks of color under the light of day now, suddenly, could be seen easily; but the colors were green, black, and blue.

He blinked his eyes, looked again, then went back into the powerhouse. In the washroom he took three aspirins and a glass of soda. He barely had time to do this before alarms were ringing from the switchboard.

Half running back out of the washroom into the large space containing the three turbogenerator units, he went to the switchboard.

Except under sudden great changes of load the automatic controls took care of things. When a sudden load change took place the automatic controls sometimes set up a steady rocking that made the generators alternately whine and hum as they speeded up and slowed down in response to the controls.

John Green did a little manual adjusting until things were steady again. Then he glanced at the meters.

What he saw was apparently worse than the blue fog. He went back to the washroom and started to take some more aspirins. He stopped, remembering he had just taken some.

Soberly he left the washroom and went to the office. From the bottom drawer of his desk he took a bottle. He took a long swallow from it, started to return it to the drawer, then

took another.

Scott Doty, town marshal, was walking down Main Street when the blue fog appeared. He merely squinted his eyes and kept walking. He was studying it thoughtfully.

Fifteen minutes later he thought of something. He turned back along the way he had been going and went into the telephone building.

"Get me that Oklahoma City paper that pays for odd bits of news, Marge," he said to the operator.

"Come in and get it yourself on the other switchboard," Marge snapped. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

And she was busy. The board was full of lights. She plugged in one.

"Yes?" she said bruskiy. "No. There's no fire. I don't have time to go out and look."

Scott Doty listened while she repeated the same words to others on the phone.

"The farmers," Marge said. "They say there's a blue haze settled all over town, shining like a fog of blue smoke lit up by fire. But they can't see any flames, just the blue haze."

"That's what I'm calling the paper about," the marshal said.

"Humph," Marge snorted. "I beat you to it ten minutes ago. A reporter's driving over right now."

Scott Doty, looked at Marge's, flying fingers, sighed and left. He scowled at the blue fog as if it were to blame for the fact that Marge would get the five dollars from the paper instead of him.

Feeling in need of consolation, he hurried his steps toward the power plant. Ten minutes later he stepped into the plant. John Green was standing in front of the switchboard, a bottle of whiskey in his hand.

Scott frowned. He knew that John took a little nip now and then; but it was going too far to have the bottle right out in the open.

"Look!" John said when he saw the marshal.

Scott looked at the board with its instruments. They were meaningless to him.

"Better put that bottle away, John," he growled. "If anybody else saw you with it I'd have to report you to save my own job."

Suddenly alarm bells behind the board started ringing. Pointers on meters started jumping around. The one turbine in operation started alternate humming and whining.

"Hold it," John said, thrusting the bottle into the marshal's hands. Then he manipulated the manual controls until things quieted down to a steady hum.

"What happened?" Scott asked.

John Green looked at the now normally functioning meters and took the bottle out of the marshal's unresisting clutch.

"Nothing," he said. "Nobody'd believe me. In fact, I don't believe it. So nothing happened."

He went into the office and put the bottle in the bottom drawer of the desk.

HARRY SHAW scuffed unwillingly into the bank. It was ten o'clock Monday morning. There were dark blots under his eyes, wretchedness in his whole bearing.

"Morning, Harry," Jim Appleby said, taking in these details of Harry's appearance silently.

"Hi," Harry mumbled.

"See that blue fog we had yesterday morning, Harry?" Jim Appleby asked conversationally.

"I didn't get up until noon," Harry said. "Didn't see it."

"Too bad," Appleby said. "It was gone entirely by ten o'clock. Strangest thing you ever saw. By the way, find out anything more about that leak?"

Harry Shaw shifted his feet noisily

and said nothing. This was the moment he had dreaded, and even now he didn't know what to say or do, though he had spent a sleepless weekend trying to find an answer.

"Look, Mr. Appleby," he said, "would it be all right if I paid the difference in meter readings out of my own pocket? Would that make it all right?"

"Heard you were at the dance Saturday night," Appleby said, ignoring Harry's question. "Was it Quinley's daughter?"

"What if it was?" Harry asked half angrily.

"Now you look here!" Jim Appleby started to say in retort. He glanced around. In a lower voice he went on. "I told you what this means." Harry nodded. "All right, then," Appleby went on, "look at it this way. Let's say Quinley is a crook. Then one of two things could happen. He could get all the bank's money. Would he stick around here then? No! He'd take his girl and disappear. You'd never see her again, and the town would be bankrupt. Or we could catch him and arrest him. In that case his daughter would be left stranded here—and you could straighten things out with her later."

"If she'd speak to me," Harry said bleakly. Appleby ignored the opening this remark gave him.

"On the other hand," he said, "if Quinley is on the level, then what you do won't change anything. No one ever need know. The world will get its greatest invention, and a few of us including Quinley will make a lot of money."

Harry, without saying anything, turned and started toward the door.

"Where're you going?" Jim Appleby called after him. He turned around slowly and faced the bank president.

"I'm quitting my job," he said. "I don't like the way you push all the

responsibility for everything onto me. I've done my work. Even things I didn't have to do. Now I'm through."

Jim Appleby watched him until the door closed. Then he grabbed the phone. A moment later he was talking with John Green's wife.

"I don't care if John is asleep," he said. "Wake him up. This's important." He tapped his fingers impatiently until the graveyard engineer yawned into the phone. "Listen, John," he said. "Put on your clothes. I've got a job for you. Get down here to the bank as quick as you can." He hung up before John Green could reply. That, he knew, would worry John and make him do as he was told.

Next he called up MacGregor and Godlove and told them to be ready. He had already talked the whole thing over with them on Sunday, after church.

Finally he called Horace Quinley. It was Ann who answered.

"Father is out in his workshop," her voice sounded.

"Tell him to call me," Appleby said, and hung up.

John Green came into the bank, his eyes still half asleep, and very worried. He was wondering how Appleby had found out about the bottle. He was so worried that he had finished dressing on the way down, buttoning his shirt, tying his shoelaces, and other last details as he walked.

"You're here," Appleby said. "Good. This is what I want. There's some wires from the building behind the Quinley place. You know the one. Used to be Peters' a year ago. I want you to pick up some pliers and go out there and find those wires. Don't cut them, and be careful you aren't seen. We'll be out in a little while. Hide where you can see that building. When you see me take out a white handkerchief, cut those wires. Understand?"

"UGH UM um mff," Horace Quinley said drowsily, his beard wagging. He opened his eyes. Ann was looking down at him, an affectionate smile on her lips.

"Wake up, dad," she said for the fifth time. "Mr. Appleby wants you to call him at the bank."

"Appleby?" he echoed, sitting up wide awake. "Tell him I'll be right there."

"He isn't on the phone," Ann said. "He hung up. He wants you to call him. I told him you were out in your workshop."

She left the bedroom. Five minutes later her father came padding out, hooking his suspenders.

"Fix me some coffee, girl," he growled.

"It's all ready, dad," she said, holding out a cup smilingly.

"Oh," he said. His eyes apologized as he accepted it. He set it beside the phone and sipped at the hot liquid while he called the bank's number.

"We're all ready to complete the contract, Professor Quinley," Jim Appleby's voice came over the phone. "We'll be right out with the money and the papers to sign. Four certified checks for fifty thousand each, so that you can cash them as you need them. But we'd like another demonstration. Can you give us one?"

"Glad to," Horace Quinley said, a trifle dazed.

"Okay," Jim Appleby said. "We'll be out in half an hour."

Horace Quinley hung up slowly, his action mechanical. When he had named the two hundred thousand dollar figure he had just been talking. He would have been glad to get ten thousand. Enough to settle somewhere and live until Ann got married, and a few years after. He was both awed and scared by it.

He started out the back door, mov-

ing slowly and in a daze.

"Father!" Ann said. "Aren't you going to eat your breakfast?"

He turned back, saw the eggs and bacon steaming on the table. Still in a daze, he sat down and ate a little. Then he shoved the food back.

"Got to get out to the shop," he said. "When Appleby comes send him right back. Don't talk to him."

He stumbled twice going to the workshop. Inside, he tried the light switch. When the light didn't go on he remembered it was burned out.

Then he saw the extension cord strung from the control panel to the wall outlet.

"Darn," he muttered. "I forgot to pull it out Saturday night."

He pulled it out now. Getting another light globe out of a drawer, he climbed on a chair and put it in. Then he inspected the resistance wire spiral.

It had burned out sometime after he had gone back to bed Saturday night. He found the break.

Getting tools, he repaired the break by hooking bent ends of the broken wires around a small brass screw and tightening a nut against them to hold them.

Sudden memory alarmed him. He bent down and placed his ear against the concrete base of his machine. An almost inaudible hum told him the wires leading to the pole were still uncut. He grinned. Love had conquered Harry Shaw where mere money or threats wouldn't have.

As he straightened up there was a knock, and Appleby came in followed by MacGregor and Godlove. The three were beaming like three cats with a mouse.

Horace beamed back at them the same way. He knew the greed of small town suckers. When they saw a chance to get rich quick they fell for it, letting their greed seep out to blind their

judgement. It really wasn't a crime. . .

Appleby took four checks out of a fat envelope and held them before Horace's eyes. They were certified checks made out to Horace Quinley. Each was for fifty thousand.

"Before we fix up the papers we'd like to see the Cosmic Energy Converter work again," he said, sliding the checks out of sight in the envelope again.

"Of course," Horace said. He picked up the extension cord and plugged it in. The resistance wire spiral began to glow nicely. He threw the knife switch that made the heavy relay throw impressively. When the motor-generator assembly was whining at high pitch he unplugged the extension and coiled it up on the hook on the control panel.

"Satisfied?" he smiled confidently.

The three men nodded grimly.

"Now," Jim Appleby said, pulling everything out of the envelope. "To save time we've already signed where we're supposed to. If you'll sign where we've checked—"

Horace Quinley took the proffered pen with shaking fingers. He signed the five papers without reading them. When he handed them back to Appleby, he took the four certified checks, glanced at each, and folded them neatly, placing them in his billfold.

Jim Appleby glanced out a window casually.

"Nice view you have," he said. He took out his handkerchief and wiped at the window. On the second wipe the generator lost its whine and began to slow down.

HARRY SHAW sat in the back booth of the cafe, one foot propped up on the bench, elbow on knee, and face in palm. Half a cup of cold grease-filmed coffee sat in front of him. The juke box was playing a western song blaringly. He was so quiet even the waitress had forgotten him.

The street door burst open. Four men came in, laughing and talking. They sat down and gave their dinner orders loudly, then started talking among themselves again.

The song on the juke box ended. In the sudden quiet the men's voices were loud.

"Imagine it," one of them said. "Professor Quinley turns out to be a swindler. It was sure smart the way old Appleby trapped him—right with certified checks for two hundred thousand bucks in his pocket! And George Green did the trick by cutting the wires when Appleby signaled him through the window. This is going to put Cranby on the map!"

Loud laughter greeted this. Another spoke up.

"Yeah," he said. "And Harry Shaw was out with Quinley's daughter Saturday night. I wouldn't be surprised but what she's his moll instead of his daughter."

Knowing laughter exploded over this. It came to an abrupt, dramatic stop as Harry stood up and their eyes fell on him.

"Gee, Harry," the speaker said weakly. "I didn't know you was back there."

Harry started down the aisle toward the four, his face grim. The speaker, his face turning pale, jumped off the stool and ran out the door. The other three remained where they were, pale and nervous, as Harry brushed past them.

Outside, he climbed into his car and ground the starter. The motor burst into life. He made a wild U turn and drove toward Quinley's place.

There was a pale, lonely light in the kitchen. A police car was parked in front. Harry stopped just behind it. When he shut off his lights and the motor had climbed out, the door of the police car opened. A face stuck out.

"You can't go in there, son," a kind-

ly voice said.

"The heck I can't," Harry said. "I'm going in—or you're going to have to take me down to the station for resisting an officer."

"Oh, it's you, Harry," the policeman said. "Go ahead. It's all right."

"Thanks," Harry choked. He ran up the walk to the porch and knocked.

Ann Quinley opened the door enough to see who it was. She gasped and started to close it again. Harry held it.

"Go away," she said. "You don't want to see me."

"Yes I do, Ann," he said firmly, his pressure on the door opening it slowly. He stepped inside and closed it.

The room was dark except for the light coming in from the open kitchen door.

"All right," Ann said angrily. "Go ahead and tell me you hate me. Call me a crook, like you came here to do, and get out."

"I didn't even come to say your father's a crook," Harry said. "Because I don't think he is. Not exactly." He looked at her gravely. She looked into his eyes questioningly.

"What makes you say that?" she asked wonderingly. "Why, even I have to admit the evidence proves it!"

"Maybe the evidence does," Harry said patiently. "But you disprove it."

"I—I don't know what you mean," Ann said.

"Your dad raised you up all by himself," Harry explained patiently. "He's always provided a home for you. He's raised you into the finest girl I ever knew. He couldn't have done that if he's a crook. I don't care *what* the evidence says. I knew that evidence was there before anybody else did. And I kept quiet, because I knew there must be some reason for things that the professor isn't giving out."

"You mean—you don't think he's a crook?" Ann asked.

"No," Harry said doggedly. "I don't."

"Then—" Ann took Harry's hand and tried to drag him toward the door—"What are we waiting for? Let's go tell them, explain to them—"

"No," Harry said. "They won't believe us. We've just got to wait."

"All right, Harry," Ann said in low-voiced obedience.

Abruptly she was in his arms, close against him, crying unrestrainedly. And he was patting her soft hair with clumsy tenderness, a tear streaming down his tanned cheek.

DR. REYNARD H. TEMPLE was sound asleep in a private room at the Salt Lake City airport. The army officer shook him, first gently, then roughly.

"Wake up, Dr. Temple," he said. When Rey sat up, still under the effects of a sleep of total exhaustion, he went on. "The energy sphere has broken away!"

"What!" Rey said, jumping to his feet. He followed the officer to the radio tower. There he was connected with one of the jet pilots.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"It was going along as it has been doing," the pilot's voice said. "Twenty minutes ago it started to pick up speed, fast. It almost caught us napping after its moseying along doing nothing in particular for so long. But we caught up with it."

"Good," Rey said. "Where is it now?"

"That's what we don't know," came the answer.

"What!" Rey said. "Oh my God!"

"It kept picking up speed," the pilot went on hastily. "I'm riding the new supersonic that does fourteen hundred. I was the last to lose it. At nine hundred it began to die out. I dropped over to one side where I could see better. At fourteen hundred it was

narrowed down to just a blue line. It was still that way when it went ahead of me and I lost it."

"Where did you lose it, and what was its direction?" Rey demanded.

"Over Denver, headed slightly south of east."

"What time?" Rey asked.

"Just five minutes ago," came the reply. "Two forty-seven, Sunday morning."

"Lord!" Rey said, and it was a prayer.

The officer that had awakened him began talking when Rey dropped the phone.

"We've already notified Washington," he said. "Washington is alerting every field. All available military planes are being sent up to search for it. Washington says that any orders you wish to give will take precedence."

"Thanks," Rey said tiredly. "No, no orders. Wake me if it's found. Otherwise let me finish my sleep."

It was a sensible decision, because the energy sphere was not sighted again until Sunday afternoon. When it was found it was ambling lazily along, now and then jumping a little, as if laughing at something.

Three hours later, Rey Temple, riding in a jetplane from Salt Lake City to the spot half way between Springfield and St. Louis where the energy sphere was, reached it.

It seemed no different than it had been before, to his inquiring eyes. It was acting skittish, often moving up or down a thousand feet swiftly, or the same distance one way or another off its course; but it was still as big as it had been, still as luminous, still as blue.

The pilot tapped his shoulder and handed him the radiophone. It was Washington asking for suggestions.

"All I can think of," Rey said, "is to find out where it has been. There

may be some rumor that will lead to that. Maybe some farmer saw it someplace and called a newspaper."

As the afternoon and evening wore on, the energy sphere continued its playful, aimless wandering, heading ever eastward, but seldom actually going that way in a straight line. It maintained an altitude of almost five miles.

At midnight Rey turned over the job of watching to the other planes. His pilot dropped down to the St. Louis airport. Rey decided to sleep in a bed for a change. He took a taxi into town after being assured he would be called if anything turned up, or if the behavior of the energy sphere showed signs of changing.

He checked in at the hotel. Deciding to have something to eat before going to bed, he went into the dining room. A Sunday night edition of the Monday morning paper had been left at the table by its previous occupant. Rey rescued it from the bus boy's clutches as he cleaned the table, and spread it out.

The headlines caught his eye at once. MYSTERY. FOG GRIPS TOWN FOR FOUR HOURS SUNDAY. In the right hand double column spread he started to read. "A strange blue fog gripped Cranby, Oklahoma, in the early morning hours Sunday, leading surrounding farmers to believe the town had caught fire," it began.

"Never mind my order," Rey said to the waiter. He jumped up and hurried out to the hotel desk. "Get me a taxi," he said. "And call the airport to have my plane ready for me at once. Also cancel my room reservation."

DR. REYNARD H. TEMPLE had spent a busy day after arriving at Cranby. He had come with two main objectives in mind. First, to talk with farmers who had seen the blue fog, and from them learn just where it had lain.

It had been noon when he got there with two army engineer trucks loaded with equipment and competent engineers. They had gone right to work, looking for farmers that lived about four miles from town; and separated from one another by three or four miles.

There were enough of them so that by evening the exact area over which the fog had lain was marked on the survey map.

He had even found three farmers who had actually seen the first signs of the fog. Their descriptions tallied exactly. It hadn't come from anywhere. One instant there had been nothing but the normal pale haze of Cranby's street lights illuminating the dust content of the air. The next instant there had been the softly luminous blue haze.

With the first objective accomplished, he and his army crew went into Cranby itself. As they drove down Main Street the town seemed almost asleep—until someone came running out of a cafe, jumped into a car, and made a tire screeching U turn in the middle of the block, forcing the truck Rey was in to stop abruptly and upset some of the equipment in the back.

The Cranby Hotel was a three-story frame box affair. Rey and his crew checked in for the night. Their second objective might take a week to accomplish—or it might never be accomplished. It was to find the cause of the energy sphere's sudden jump to, and settling into Cranby.

The pursuit of this objective would take two separate paths. First, there would be the discrete questioning of natives who had experienced the fog, their impressions and reactions, in an attempt to find out if the energy sphere had in any way exhibited new properties while here at Cranby Second, under Rey's supervision, the army engineers would probe with various instru-

ments, searching for radio-activity, unusual radiations of other types—or anything else that might provide a clue to the cause of the attraction. This might prove hopeless, because whatever had attracted the energy sphere had obviously ceased to attract it, or it wouldn't have left.

The questioning brought out only the fact that there seemed to have been no unusual or noticeable changes in the manifestations of the thing. Answers to his questions about the blue fog were absentminded. The capture of some international swindler had set the town agog, and many people who had actually been in the blue fog had almost forgotten it with the excitement of having the swindler locked up in the town jail.

By midnight everyone seemed to have gone to bed. Even the night clerk at the hotel was asleep behind the desk.

"We might as well give up for today, huh?" the officer in charge of the engineers said to Rey.

"You go ahead," Rey said. "I'll try one more person before I call it a day. The telephone girl."

He left the hotel and started along Main Street. A man wearing a star on his coat came toward him. Rey found the directions to get to the telephone building from him, and read "Marshal" on the star. He went on until he found the place.

"I don't know a thing, and I'm sick of it," Marge said irritably. "My arm's still tired from answering all the farmers who thought the town was on fire."

"Thanks, anyway," Rey said. He turned to leave.

"Maybe the marshal can tell you something," Marge called after him.

Rey spent a fruitless hour looking for the town marshal, then gave it up and headed for the hotel. When he entered it he found the marshal there asleep in a chair. Rey looked at the

sleeping man dispiritedly. It would be a shame to wake him, and he wouldn't know anything anyway.

He started to pass him and go upstairs. The marshal opened his eyes.

"Hi," he said. "Find the telephone office all right?"

"Yes, I found it," Rey said. "The operator couldn't tell me anything much. I've been looking for you."

"What's on your mind?" the marshal asked. "By the way, my name's Scott Doty. What's yours?"

"Rey Temple," Rey said. "I'm with the army engineers that came in today. I'm sort of government scientist. We're trying to find out something about that blue fog you had here night before last."

"You've come to the right man," Scott said, sitting up. He started talking, and in five minutes Rey decided he hadn't come to the right man. The marshal wasn't telling him anything he hadn't heard all afternoon.

"I've heard all that from other people," Rey finally interrupted him. "What I want is something different that no one else noticed."

"Can't think of a thing," Scott said. As Rey stood up to go upstairs he added, "Unless—but no, that couldn't have had anything to do with the fog."

"What couldn't?" Rey asked.

"George Green, engineer at the power plant was having some trouble with the power lines that night," Scott said. "But my personal opinion is that it was just his headache. If you feel like you want to talk to him I'll take you over there."

"**W**AKE UP, you old crook," Bebe Doty, the jailor, said disrespectfully to the softly snoring Horace Quinley.

"Sssss. Mf pf pf pf," Horace mumbled, waking up. "Huh?" He looked around him, took in the bars. "Ohhh," he groaned.

"Wake up," Bebe repeated. "You gotta be ready to go to court in half an hour. You're to be arraigned and bail set this morning."

Horace sat up. There were new lines on his face above the mussed up beard. He stuck his feet over the edge of the hard cot and shook his head to clear it.

"The suckers you've trimmed ought to see you now," Bebe Doty taunted. "It took a hick town like Cranby to catch you up."

"I'm innocent, I tell you," Horace said defiantly. But his defiance was only half-hearted. He had never heard of anyone being caught so neatly and so completely as he had been. He knew he didn't stand a ghost of a chance. But deep in his mind he knew that, for Ann's sake, he must keep on shouting his innocence. He didn't care what the world thought if he could preserve her illusions about him.

"Tell it to the judge," Bebe said. "He's my uncle." And half an hour later, Horace Quinley, handcuffed to a police officer, was led into the court room to do just that. Tell it to the judge, who, from the glint in his eye, had already made up his mind ahead of time.

Horace's eyes went to the audience in the room. Ann was sitting in the front row. Unbelievably she was smiling at him happily, encouragingly. She waved a small handkerchief at him and nodded her head.

He turned his head away, feeling sick.

"Poor kid," he thought. "This has unbalanced her."

Then he did a double take and looked back at her. It was the young man beside her. That lineman who had cut his wires and then taken Ann to the dance. Harry Shaw. Harry was grinning at him. Taunting him? That must be it, but his grin certainly looked friendly. And he was holding

Ann's hand possessively.

That was it. Ann was so sure her poor old dad was innocent that her enthusiasm had spread to Harry. They were in love. Poor kids.

The officer prodded him gently. He turned around to face the judge.

During the next ten minutes there was bewildering legal procedure. Horace didn't hear half of it, and didn't understand what he heard. There was the moment when he was ordered to state whether he pleaded guilty or not guilty. With great dignity he stood up. This was the moment that had to be just right. He surveyed the packed courtroom slowly. Then he spoke.

"I'm perfectly aware," he said slowly, "that this court is already convinced of my guilt. I must admit that if I were a stranger I would believe myself guilty from the evidence. But I am innocent. It's useless for me to try to prove it to the court. I doubt if anyone here has the intelligence or the education to even begin to understand if I were to try. Nevertheless, I plead innocent. Let the court do its worst—as it obviously intends to do."

He sat down amid a silence more impressive than any applause he had ever received. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Ann and Harry nod at each other and shake the hands they were holding in a gesture of "That's, tellin' 'em." A lump rose to his throat at their loyalty.

Now Jim Appleby, visibly trembling with excitement and self importance, came forward. He was identifying the papers Horace had signed. He was eyeing the four certified checks and nodding his head. MacGregor and Godlove were shifting impatiently in their chairs, waiting for their turn in the limelight.

Suddenly the judge looked away from Appleby toward the back of the room, frowning. Appleby stopped talk-

ing and turned to see what was the trouble.

HORACE followed their gaze. The double doors were wide open. A man was walking down the aisle to the front. Behind him, entering through the open doors, were soldiers in uniform, guns holstered on their hips.

Horace's eyes swung to his daughter, Ann. She was positively jumping up and down in her chair now, delight on her face.

"Poor kid," he thought, and turned to study the young man who was now entering through the short gate.

"May I ask what the meaning of this intrusion is?" the judge was asking coldly, though with doubt behind it, caused by the grim line of army uniforms at the back wall of the room.

"I represent the Government of the United States," Rey said with equal coldness. "Here are my credentials." He laid his opened wallet before the judge.

"I still don't understand," the judge said after reading the card. "This says you are an atom scien—"

"If it pleases the court," Rey said icily, "we will leave my status unmentioned. I understand this court is holding Professor Quinley prisoner on some charge or other, because he refuses—quite rightly—to divulge the secret of his Cosmic Energy Converter. Later when there's more time I can prove that that machine is not the fake your town banker, fuel dealer, and mill owner think it to be.

"Right now all I can take time to say is that I have been out to Professor Quinley's laboratory and examined the machine, and found it to be what he claims. Sunday morning when the blue fog was here—caused, incidentally, by Professor Quinley's machine—that machine was providing nearly all the electricity being used in town.

Your generator plant was using no fuel. Your night engineer who is in this court right now can testify to that."

"That's right," George Green spoke up from the audience. "I refused to believe it at the time, but lights were burning all over town, and the generators, instead of putting out power, were actually running the turbines like they were motors!"

Appleby, Godlove, and MacGregor were whispering among themselves hurriedly. It went unnoticed in the general roar of conversation rising in the room.

"Order in the court," the judge roared, pounding the bench with his gavel.

"If it pleases the court," Jim Appleby said loudly, rising, "we would like to withdraw our charge. And," he said, taking the certified checks and the papers off the judge's bench, "we are ready to go through with our deal as Professor Quinley's partners."

He handed the four checks to Quinley with a stately bow. Horace Quinley looked at the young man questioningly, then, as the man shrugged, accepted the two hundred thousand dollars.

"And now," Jim Appleby said, turning to Rey, "as the professor's business partners and advisors, shall we go where there is more privacy, to discuss—ah—the business aspects of this great invention?"

IT WAS HALF an hour later, in the Quinley residence. Outside, the blue fog penetrated everything. Inside, Appleby, Godlove, and MacGregor were impatient to discuss business with Dr. Reynard H. Temple chief atomic scientist in the Government Research Commission.

But Horace Quinley was even more anxious to discuss things with him.

"If you gentlemen will wait," he said

firmly, "I want to have a private conference with my—er—colleague in science." Then, to Rey, "Let's go out to my laboratory, Dr. Temple."

Rey, concealing a smile, led the way. And Ann and Harry stole out after them a moment later.

"Now then," Horace said when he and Rey were alone. "What the devil is all this about? You must know that—"

"Before you say anything you'll regret," Rey said hastily, "let me say a few things. That blue fog is caused by a sphere of pure cosmic energy. It was created by the explosion of a Super Atomic Bomb four days ago out on the Pacific. Your device here is the only thing in existence that can tame it. In some way your Cosmic Lens taps it. I'm beginning to understand how, vaguely. The heated wires act as a sort of filament in a cosmic circuit, while the two copper tubes spiraled in between, and separated from each other by the insulating paint, act as a plate that drains off the energy and turns it into the exposed coil of your transformer. That makes the transformer reverse itself, and shoot power into the buried coil, which sends it out into the power line. It's doing that right now.

"We're rushing materials down here to build a portable converter to mount on a plane so we can take the energy sphere back to the Pacific base where we can experiment without danger to anyone."

"Then there's danger?" Horace asked uneasily.

"Probably not," Rey said. "We just don't want to take chances. We know quite a bit about that energy sphere already. It will either drain into energy converters until it's gone, or it will explode at a certain point like the energy spheres and set up converters near industrial centers to provide power and light.

"When your cosmic lens is turned on it attracts the energy sphere and holds it by a sort of cosmic suction due to the energy drainage. It did that shortly after the explosion which created the thing, and then early Sunday morning. You had it on then?"

"Why yes," Horace Quinley said. "I turned it on and forgot about it. The resistance wire was burned in two when I came out to the shop Monday morning."

"That checks," Rey said.

"So my cosmic energy converter really works!" Horace said quietly.

"When there's some cosmic energy for it to work on," Rey smiled.

"Did you ever hear of the man who invented the cure for which there was no dis-h-h-h-h-harrum, doctor, as I was saying—" He turned to Ann and Harry who were entering. "Ah, my children," he said, "my fellow scientist and I have been discussing old times together."

He smiled affectionately at Ann. Then he searched Harry's eyes intently.

"You really had faith in me, didn't you, son!" he said wonderingly.

"Yes sir," Harry said. "I knew you couldn't be a crook because no crook could have Ann for a daughter."

"Well, well, well," Horace said, his voice choking a little. He took out the four certified checks, peeled one off, gruffly. "Go buy yourself some decent clothes and keep the change. Come on, Dr. Temple, let's go back in the house and settle this business of my partners. Maybe they deserve a profit on their investment after all, though the late W.C. Fields would say different."

He pushed out of the shop, his eyes half blinded with hot tears of happiness.

Rey Temple smiled at Ann and Harry, then said hastily, "Don't fall for that. It's just another of his crooked schemes." As they looked at him, surprised at his words, he added, "He didn't endorse it. It's no good until he does."

"Why that isn't true!" Ann said indignantly. "He just forgot!"

But Dr. Temple was already out of the door, his departing back slightly obscured by the blue haze of ionization leakage of the energy sphere.

The flame of anger in Ann's eyes died slowly under the adoration in Harry's, looking down at her. She looked at the fifty thousand dollar certified check, sighed happily, and crept into his arms.

END OF AN ERA

BY

LESLIE PHELPS

IT WAS A touching ceremony. Naturally you saw it on the video. But I was there, and you had to be there to catch the flavor of poignancy. It was of course the opening of a whole new era—and yet it was sad.

In the saying it seems trivial. So they did close down the last of the steam power plants? So what. Ah, but it was more than that. True, now all electric power in the world is broadcast from central power plants—atomic jobs—and all you've got to do is dial the frequency, and you've got all the juice you need.

But remember for a century and a half we've been getting our electric energy from big complicated steam generating plants which burn coal or oil. They're impressive

and vast. The atomic broadcasting plants are small, silent and efficient.

But I swear that I could see a tear in the eye of the chief engineer as he threw the switch. We were all standing around—all of the commentators and observers—and we watched the huge massive rotors of the generators spin slowly to a dead stop. The fancy output dial they'd rigged showed zero power. Electricity from coal and oil was a dead issue.

In a way it seems silly making such a fuss over such a revolutionary step that means a better life for all of us. But I imagine the engineers must have felt the same way when rockets displaced aircraft, or the helis displaced autos. Oh well... that's progress...

KEEP IT SIMPLE

By Frances M. Deegan



Not until Bannon kidnapped a girl from another world did he find the answer to a triple-cross



Bannon couldn't believe his eyes. The girl he had thought thousands of miles away stood in the moon's light, arms lifted in mute appeal

"IF A TOWER could be erected here—" the old man jabbed the wall map with his gold pencil—"it would eliminate the costly relays. You will go out there and make the survey."

"Me?" I yelped. "Why me?"

Joseph P. Snell gave me his fishy-eyed, dead-pan look. "You can ask that?" he said. "After your latest caper?"

"Listen, J.P., it wasn't anything to get unnerved about. You know how these Balkans are—excitable. Dr. Delgado was a little hasty. He started screaming before he knew what he

was screaming about. That's what I came in here to tell you. It's quite a story. I thought you might want an explanation."

"Oh, no," he said. "I've had an explanation. All the details were explained to me fully and officially. You borrowed the private motor car of the Merovian minister without his knowledge and consent. That was bad enough. But the fact that his daughter happened to be in the car, compounded a felony with international complications. Only the fact that the State Department made a solemn promise to avoid scandal at any cost has prevented your immediate prosecution. Abducting a diplomat's daughter is a crime in any country."

"Felice didn't mind. In fact I told her I'd marry her in the morning. But we ran into a little interference—"

"A little! You should be full of holes!"

"Dr. Delgado is a bum shot. Anyway I took his popgun away from him, and he cooled off considerably. I'll go back in a few days and make a formal request for Felice's hand. And meanwhile—"

"You're leaving Washington tonight."

"Now see here, J.P. You're cutting off your nose to spite your face. You can't get along without me here. You've got to have my help to get that government license."

"A little more of your help and I'll not only lose all chance of a license, I'll even lose my citizenship. In the six weeks you've been in Washington, you've made Snell T-V notorious. You've violated all the rules and broken half the laws of civilized society. I realize you're abnormal, but I didn't know until now that you're too uncivilized to be turned loose in a crowded community. Do you have any idea what's the matter with you?"

"So now I'm abnormal!" I said coldly. I could be just as cold and calm as he could. "Just because I can see my way through all the red tape. Just because I'm not bothered by the false front everybody wears in this highly civilized society. When I want something, I go after it, and the hell with the silly rules. You said it yourself—that I'm the only man in your organization who could cut a trail through this Washington jungle, and what's more—"

"You've cut a trail all right. And left the wreckage strewn on all sides. I never meant for you to put on an exhibition of your theory of simplification. And now you've gone too far. This is the point where you disappear, quietly and mysteriously." He touched a buzzer on the antique desk with cold precision. He stood there dead-pan, waiting for the door to open.

I looked at him, and closed my mouth. I was not looking at my pal J.P. now. No sir. This was Joseph P. Snell, the multi-millionaire. The hard cold tycoon with plenty of power behind him. He was a stocky man, who stood with his shoulders back and his gray head lifted autocratically. He kept this fine house in Washington to be used whenever one or more of his many interests came up for government attention. At the moment he was interested in television.

This was the first time he had pulled the big frozen tycoon act with me, and it made me sore. So I didn't tell him what I had accidentally found out about the Merovian government.

THE DOOR opened quietly and Vice-president Corboy came in. He was the middle-aged executive type. He handled details for J.P. He didn't look at me. He said: "Yessir."

"The arrangements are completed?" J.P. said quietly.

"Everything has been arranged, yessir."

"Ask those gentlemen to step in here."

"Yessir." He went out, still without looking at me. This Corboy was an important cog in the Snell enterprises. He was executive Veep several times over. The fact that he was handling this business, and not some lesser boy, made the thing look ominous.

The two gentlemen came in, and they both looked directly at me. They were ordinary, nice looking guys, but I knew.

"You didn't have to do it this way, J.P.," I said. "I can disappear without any help. Why don't you just fire me and forget about it?"

"Since I was responsible for turning you loose in Washington, I must also take the responsibility of suppressing you, by government request. These gentlemen are from the FBI. They have been delegated to see you safely on your way. Gentlemen, this is Mike Bannon. He is not as wild as you may have been led to believe. He merely has a passion for simplifying things."

They looked at me calmly without smiling.

"A fine thing!" I said. "I came in here to give you a full explanation, and you turn me over to the FBI without listening to one word. You're slipping, J.P. You've lost your touch. You better get out of Washington yourself before you get suffocated with the hot air."

"At the moment," he said dryly, "I am acting under government orders. Later, perhaps, I shall have an opportunity to show you how I prefer to handle a hoodlum like you. Until then, good afternoon, gentlemen."

Of course, I had made no promises, and I had no intention of flying out West to Mount Morgan to make a

survey. None whatever. I should have known better. When the old man gave orders, they were carried out. Corboy was a demon for detail, and the FBI was efficient and thorough. They saw me on my way. In fact they went all the way. We made the last stage in a pair of helicopters. Then the helicopters flew away with everybody else, and there I was on Mount Morgan—marooned. Maybe for life.

And then again, maybe not. I could set up the equipment and get into communication with the outer world. I could announce a fabulous uranium strike, and get plenty of company. People. They'd find their way up there, one way or another. Like ants. I decided to sleep on the idea. Maybe I'd get a better one.

It was cold up there at night, but I had a cozy tent and a brand new sleeping bag. The wind sang a lullaby and a mountain stream murmured past the camp. I should have slept like a rock—hard, that is. But I didn't. I kept thinking about Felice Delgado. I had to do something about her for two reasons.

Her papa was not on the up and up. He was a spy. That was one reason.

Felice had liquid green eyes and raven black hair. She had a short nose with flaring nostrils, and a full pouting mouth that was oddly tantalizing. It seemed to be forever pushing itself at you. For a girl with her warm temperament, Felice was in a bad spot. She wanted out. I had let her out briefly, and now I was marooned on Mount Morgan. I felt like I had been torn in half. That was the other reason.

I got so upset, just thinking about her, I thought I could hear her calling me: "Ma-yak! Ma-yak!" That was as close as she could come to saying Mike. It was too close. I couldn't stand it.

I CRAWLED out of the sleeping bag and pulled on my boots and went outside in the moonlight. She was standing on the other side of the stream, holding out her arms and making an odd little crying noise like a mourning dove. It's a wonder I didn't break my neck getting over there. She was solid and real and thoroughly wonderful to hold. She tore her lips away, and said: "The papa is weeth."

"Oh-oh. You better get out of the way. He's probably got another pop-gun."

"No-no-no. Is for talk."

"Good evening." The papa came out of the shadowy brush, and stopped a few feet away, staring at me intently. Suddenly he said: "Kavna!"

"Kavna bro. Kavna Kono." They were the first words I had learned. They came out of my mouth automatically.

"You are one of us," he said, "did you not know?"

I just stood there, holding onto Felice, and staring back at him in the unearthly moonlight. A strange emotion was beating a deep gong in the very center of my being. It was strange, and yet it was as familiar as any part of me. Here was the answer, I knew, to the lifelong riddle that had tormented me, the strange instincts that made me different from all other men. Nevertheless, my reason told me that this man was an enemy.

"How did you get up here?" I asked abruptly.

"That will be explained." He made a smooth gesture with one hand. As if it were nothing, traveling 1500 miles to land on a strange mountain at midnight, apparently in a noiseless conveyance. "Tell me this—where is your father?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, yes," he murmured soothing-

ly. "You must know. Only he could have taught you the words. Come now. I am his friend. You see that I recognized you at once when you brought Felice back. That is why you were able to take the gun away from me. But I had not expected you to move so fast and so far. I came after you at once. Now tell me."

"I don't know. He was with us only a little while. When I was small. He did teach me the words, but I don't remember him very well. I can't even remember what he looked like. All I know is that he disappeared, and my mother died too, when I was young. I grew up in an orphans' home. I never knew what the words meant. They just stayed with me."

"Ah, that explains it. Well, so you are one of us."

"I don't think so. I don't think my father was a Merovian. But even if he was, that's no reason why I should help you spy on this country."

"You are quite right. Your father was not a Merovian, nor am I. You have a feeling for Felice, eh?"

"I have a feeling," I said. "And I intend to do something about it. But if you try to use Felice to influence me, I warn you, I am not entirely without resources myself."

"There you are mistaken. You are thinking now like a worldling. You expect me to withhold my daughter in order to bargain with you, to induce you to join in a nefarious plot against your native country. No, no, paga—dear son. You and Felice belong to each other. It is right. You know it yourself, even without knowing why."

"It sounds fine the way you say it, but what does it mean?"

"It means that you and Felice are the children of another planet. The seeds planted by members of an expedition from Kono, a great world

many light years away in another galaxy. We were scattered over this planet during the time of the first World War. Needless to say, our arrival was scarcely noticed. There were so many refugees, and we were only seven. Seven lone colonists who were to establish themselves in widely separated areas. You are surprised?"

"No. No, I'm not surprised. I'd like to meet the other members of your expedition."

"I, too. But conditions in Merovia prevented me from locating the others. I do not know if they were successful."

"I am col' like ice!" Felice tried to crawl inside my shirt.

"I'm sorry, doll. I'll build a fire."

"That might not be safe," Delgado said. "Come. I will show you my machine. You do not quite believe what I have told you. Perhaps that will convince you."

I let go of Felice, but she made no attempt to separate herself. "We go now," she said happily. "We take you weeth."

DELGADO went on ahead. He was a big, dark man, and going up the slope he looked even bigger. With Felice clinging to my arm, I wanted to trust him. But all my experience was against it, in spite of the remembered words, and that deep sense of recognition. Felice tugged at my arm gently.

"Is okay," she said.

"Kavna!"

"Kavna bro," she murmured. "Kavna Kono."

"Did you learn those words, too?"

"Oh, yes. All the time since I am one years old. Is okay, dolling."

"Sure. The fix I'm in now, what can I lose?" We followed her papa up the shadowy slope.

The "machine" was a dull black

ovoid, about the size of a trailer. There was an opening in the side. Delgado stepped in and a faint blue light came up slowly, barely illuminating the interior. I had expected to meet a crew of Merovian cut-throats, but there was nobody there. I went in with Felice, and quite suddenly I was convinced.

There was a dream I used to have when I was a kid. I hadn't had it for a long time. But this was it. This comfortable, central lounge was the setting for my dream. It was oval shaped with a black pool in the center, surrounded by a circular divan, and in my dream I used to lie on my stomach on the soft-cushioned divan, and watch the pictures in the pool. It made a nice dream.

"You are remembering something?" Dr. Delgado murmured.

"Yes. Yes, I've been here before. A long time ago."

"Not here. Your father also had such a machine. It is called a *yag*. These machines were geared to the motion of the planet. Do you understand relativity?"

"The space-time continuum? Yes. The fourth dimension is time."

"Or motion. In the universal sense, time and motion are inter-changeable. Everything is in motion, and all motion can be measured by time, once you have a reference point. By changing your reference point, motion becomes force. Do you follow me?"

"Yes. If you are on a speeding train you can move about freely and with a fair degree of safety. The train is your reference point and everything outside the train seems to be moving past you. But if you try to step off the speeding train, your point of reference changes to the solid earth, and the motion of the train becomes a dangerous force."

"Now suppose you have a maneu-

verable machine capable of synchronizing its speed perfectly with that of the train."

"Theoretically you would be able to step from one to the other, but your reference point—"

"Is still the earth, yes. But you have overcome the motion of the train. Now suppose you are dealing with a spinning globe, moving through space at the rate of eighteen and a half miles per second—"

"I get it. Your reference point would be the sun and you could touch any point on the earth by speeding up to catch it, or waiting for it to come around, and then synchronizing your speed to match it."

"And unless you synchronize perfectly, the G-force is shattering. Leaving the gravitational field is not so difficult—"

"We leave now!" Felice said hopefully.

"No, *mega*. It is not so simple," her papa said fondly, and looked at me with piercing dark eyes. "You feel compelled to stay here?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"My information service is excellent."

IT WAS, TOO. He told me about it, sitting there on the familiar curved divan. I saw now that the black pool was an opaque, glasslike plate, the vision screen of the yag, on which it was possible to view the earth below when the yag was in motion. I felt as if I had come home after a long time. I kept remembering the many times when I had been walking down a street, or sitting in a crowded dining room, or looking out of a high window, and a sudden sense of loneliness and strangeness had come over me. As if I were a visitor from another world, viewing an utterly strange planet. The often repeated experience had been a

kind of fearful secret, carefully concealed. But it was this ability to view the world with the clarity of an outside observer which Joseph P. Snell had recognized and encouraged. Until now, no one had understood me as well as J.P. But as Dr. Delgado talked, I began to have a sick feeling of betrayal. Because the information of my whereabouts could have gone to the spy ring from only one place—J.P.'s office.

"The little country of Merovia," Dr. Delgado told me, "has been for some time in the hands of a group of international bandits. They have large plans for gaining control of the world through certain key figures in the various nations. I do not know all of the details of their plan, since I am not a member of the inner council, but merely a figurehead, a—what do you call it? Yes, a front man. I have worked very hard to get this appointment as Minister to the United States for my own purposes. Three of our seven colonists from Kono were located in this hemisphere. I hoped to be able to contact them. The fact that the Merovian embassy is used as a clearing house for the agents of the international gang had no particular effect on my own interests."

"Until you thought I had kidnapped Felice in order to get information on the spy ring."

"Yes. And not only I, but the chief agents. It is their intention to follow you here in order to eliminate you. For my part, I have agreed to place Felice in a secluded house under guard, until I can take her back to Merovia. As far as anyone knows, we are there now. It also happens to be where I keep the yag."

"The agents don't know about the yag?"

"Let me ask you that question. Do they?"

"No. No, of course not. That's obvious."

"Thank you. And now do you still feel compelled to stay here?"

I looked at him, and I looked at Felice curled up on the divan beside me. In the soft blue light she looked sweetly mysterious, and more desirable than any woman I had ever seen. I looked back at Delgado, and I couldn't ask the question, but he must have read the sick look on my face.

"This man, Joseph P. Snell," he said gently, "he has been close to you? A friend?"

"A friend," I said. "The best friend I ever had. I can't believe that he—"

"Is a member of this international ring? I cannot tell you with certainty. The membership is a closely guarded secret."

"But the information of my exact whereabouts had to come from his office," I muttered. "It's a cinch it didn't come from the FBI. And the plane pilots that brought me here didn't know who I was."

I remembered what J.P. had said: "This is where you disappear, quietly and mysteriously." And I had been stuck up here on a solitary mountain like a pretty little sitting duck.

I stood up suddenly, and Felice wailed: "Where you go?"

"I'm going to set up my equipment and get in touch with J.P.," I told Delgado. "That's the least I can do."

"Very well," he said calmly. "You may not have much time. We shall wait here for you."

I WENT BACK to camp and started ripping open cartons. I thought something might be missing, but it was all there, everything I needed. All I had to do was put it together. Already there was a thin, watery streak of light in the east. I knew Delgado was right, I wouldn't be given much

time... so I had to work fast.

At that I almost made it. But not quite. The sun had barely peeked over a misty horizon when the 'copter showed up, drifting straight for the camp. I put down the screwdriver and watched it come in. In a way, I was glad to see it. It was one more bit of proof that Delgado was on the level, and that I was what he said I was. I hadn't had time to realize all it could mean, but I wanted desperately to believe that I was part of that Kono colony.

I think it was for this reason that I was quite calm and impersonal when the two gents stepped out of the 'copter and walked toward me. One was a blond, beak-nosed youngster with pale, treacherous eyes. The other was a beetle-browed husky whose name turned out to be Dmitri. I never did find out what the blond kid's name was.

They sauntered over, and said: "Good morning." They looked around casually, and the kid said: "Nice camp you have here. Quite a break for us. We seem to be lost, eh, Dmitri?"

"Lost, yah."

"Lost, my foot!" I said. "Let's not stall around. You lugs were sent up here to arrange an accident. But first you'd like to find out how much I know, and what—if anything, I've done about it."

"Well, you're a cool one," blondie said, and his slim hand flicked up with an automatic. "You seem to know altogether too much."

"You'll never guess who I've just been talking to," I grinned.

His pale eyes switched to the short-wave set-up, and I stepped in with a driving punch to his stomach. He flopped over my shoulder and I heaved him at Dmitri, who was standing there uncertainly, gun in hand. I knew how it was. They had been given

orders not to shoot. There must be no unnecessary investigation at this point. A man alone on a mountain could have a fatal accident, and there would be no questions asked. But bullets would require an explanation.

Dmitri was slower than his friend. He didn't get out of the way in time and they both went down. Dmitri was mad, and he was rough. He got himself untangled and shoved the blond aside much harder than necessary. The blond was hurt. I think his head hit a rock. But Dmitri came surging up like a rabid gorilla.

I waited and side-stepped, slugging him as he went past. Instead of going down as I expected, he managed to pivot and come back at me, butting me with a head like a coconut. And then his heavy arms were working on me, pounding and flailing. No science, just dull, stolid punching. The pain in my solar plexus was paralyzing, I couldn't get out of his way. The sun had turned blood red and seemed to be coming up with a savage roar. My fists hit him with all the force of a lightfooted mosquito. My legs felt numb, but I managed to bring up a knee and fall on him in a clinch.

We slipped and rolled down a rocky incline into a shallow saucer. There were a few seconds there that I'd rather not remember. I crawled out of the hollow and left him there with a bloody head. I lay on my stomach for a while, watching blondie. He didn't move. Maybe they were both dead. I didn't know. I crawled over and doused my head in the icy stream. As soon as I could stand up, I went back to the yag.

I needn't have worried about their safety. In the morning light, the big ovoid looked like a dull, weather-beaten boulder. It felt like a boulder too, when I pounded and kicked at it. The panel lifted noiselessly. Delgado

came out and helped me inside.

"Paga!" he murmured. "I am so sorry. I thought you would be prepared for them."

"I was," I growled, "but I was curious. I wanted to see what they would do. I found out."

"So. That was like an American. Reckless. I see that the Kono-American combination is a dangerous mixture. What about your friend Mr. Snell?"

"I didn't get him. But I no longer feel compelled to stay here, now that they've started sending thugs after me. There'll be more, but with those two out of the way for the time being, we should have several hours before they find out what happened. Let's go back to Washington."

FELICE came floating out of an inner chamber, wearing a white robe made out of a cloud. She looked like an angry angel. She wanted to clean me up. But I had to see what happened when we changed over from earth to sun time.

It was automatic. The control board was very simple. Delgado flipped a key and the motion of the earth became a thrusting force that tossed us off the planet at a speed of better than 60,000 MPH. At that rate we were invisible. There was no sense of motion, but rather we seemed to be suspended in space, while the unwieldy earth fell away from us.

There was a large master dial on the control board, surrounded by six smaller dials, each with colored, jewel-like knobs or buttons arranged around the rim. The master dial selected the direction, the smaller dials were used to pinpoint the exact location wanted. The synchronizer was a separate instrument, like a large tabulating machine with ten rows of keys. This thing figured the ratio of the earth's

speed to that of the yag, allowing for atmospheric conditions, and balanced them, if the operator knew what he was doing.

For a while we sat on the divan and watched the unreal earth glide past as we speeded eastward to catch up with Washington. The selector was both sensitive and powerful, and the dark oval screen came to life vividly. We were able to view an entire state with its roads and hills and rivers, or to focus on a close-up of a town. We saw a big fire in St. Louis.

I groaned and let my aching head rest on sore hands. Felice knelt beside me and stroked my head.

"Na, na," she scolded. "Come and I make you go to bed. You are feelthy seek."

"No. No, I'm not." I looked at Delgado who was regarding me thoughtfully. "How am I going to bust up this spy ring without involving you?"

"Bust up?" He tasted the words appreciatively. "Yes, I like that, it sounds explosive. But what makes you think you must do this bust up alone?"

"Haven't you ever tripped over any of the red tape they've got strung all over Washington? It would take two years and four separate Congressional investigations to convince anyone in authority that I know what I'm talking about. They've called three strikes on me already. They won't let me back in."

"Now we are in a baseball game. Suppose I go to bat for you?"

"Can you?"

"Yes. I can go to the Secretary of State. I can repudiate the government of Merovia, and give him enough information so that he will be willing to instigate a quiet investigation."

"That's dangerous for you."

"No more dangerous than my present situation. And once the investiga-

tion is started, I think the State Department will be anxious to protect me."

WE COMPLETED our plans on the drive to Washington in the official limousine. Felice was left at the "secluded" house, which was a private hunting lodge in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Dr. Delgado supplied a complete wardrobe, and I was surprised at how well the clothes fit me. I had somehow gotten the impression that he was much bigger than me. That's the effect he had on me.

I called the house from a public phone booth and asked for Snell. I got Corboy.

"Corboy speaking," he said smugly.

"Let me talk to J.P."

"What! Who is this?"

"I'll talk to J.P."

"Bannon! Where— How did you get on this line?"

"Same as I always did. Dropped a nickel and dialed the number. Now let me talk to J.P."

"I'll take the message. Mr. Snell can't be dis—"

"The hell he can't, Corboy, old boy! You don't know how happy you've made me!"

"Now wait a minute, Mike. You've got to listen to me. This is highly irregular, and—"

"Ah, no you don't, sweetheart! For your information this is a public phone, and I'll be long gone by the time your boy scouts get here. I'll be seeing you, honeyboy, in the funny papers."

It was only two blocks down the alley to the rear of the house. I went through the garden to the side door with my keys in my hand. The door opened, and one of the guards stepped out and looked startled. Good old Corboy! Already he was throwing out the troops. This fellow recovered fast. He

reached for his gun and started toward me, opening his mouth to yell. I stooped and gave him a judo boost, headfirst into the fish pond. I got the door unlocked and slipped in while he was still floundering and splashing.

The house was quiet and there was no one on the side stairs, but the back door to J.P.'s suite was locked. I hit it with my knuckles. The door opened about three inches and Corboy peeked out. I shouldered the door and slammed a hand on his pasty face, pushing him back into the room.

J.P. stood beside his desk, eyeing me with bitter resignation. He had the phone in his hand and he was talking to the head guard. "Never mind, Anderson. He's in here with me now. No, I'll ring if I want you." He put the phone down without taking his eyes off me. He was examining the bruises on my face.

"I just heard you were back," he said. "What's the matter now? Did Corboy forget to include your favorite breakfast food in the rations?"

"Corboy never forgets. He was very careful to remember everything. If he had given orders to leave out any essential equipment in order to prevent me from reporting, it would have looked suspicious."

Corboy kept backing away from me, his jowls quivering. I made a grab for him and gave him a quick frisk and pushed him down in a chair.

"You want to hear the story of the two murderers, Corboy, old boy? They were right on time. Showed up at dawn before I could get the equipment set up—"

"You—you're mad!" he gasped.

"Damn right, I'm mad. I don't like to get murdered so early in the morning. I came back here to haunt you."

"How *did* you get back here?" J.P. asked calmly.

"Are you sure you can spare the

time for an explanation?" I inquired politely. "You remember the last time I was in here, you were somewhat rushed, and—"

Corboy started out of the chair and I slapped him back.

"Mike—ah, let's not muss him up too much," J.P. said. "It won't look well when the police get here."

"What do you want with the police?"

"Obviously one of you is going to jail. I'll decide which one, after I've heard both your stories. Go ahead."

"Thanks. But first you better protect yourself, J.P. Pick up your phone and get the FBI. Tell 'em you have reason to think Mike Bannon flew the coop. Ask 'em to have their local men investigate that camp on Mount Morgan immediately."

"No!" Corboy squawked. "You must not—"

"I can't think of any reason why I shouldn't," J.P. said coldly, and picked up his phone.

Corboy was in a bad way. He had started gibbering to himself. I grinned at him, and touched my battered face. I felt very happy.

J.P. put down the phone, and I let him have it. The works. All except Dr. Delgado's appearance in the yag. I said I had been in touch with the Merovian minister and he was now in conference with the Secretary of State.

J.P. remained quite calm, but his face was stone white when he looked at his cringing vice president. "Corboy?" he said softly.

"This is... I didn't intend to have it break this way!" Corboy whimpered. "But it's big, sir! A tremendous thing. I've been working on it quietly. I wanted to have everything in order before I presented the proposition to you. Why, it would make you one of the most powerful men—"

"That will do!" J.P. snapped. "If

it's what Mike claims it is, I'll have nothing to do with it—and you know it. You know better than anyone else that I don't want that kind of power. How many times have I turned down your lesser suggestions? Why would I be willing to sit here in Washington week after week, waiting for the FCC to make up its mind to issue me a license, in spite of your offer to get it for me overnight by exerting pressure in the proper places? No—you can't hand me the mess, now that it has been uncovered." He sat down quite suddenly, and reached for the phone. His voice was a little hoarse when he said: "You have my permission to hit him, Mike, if he tries to move out of that chair."

IT WAS A very pleasant little family dinner we had a few weeks later at the hunting lodge. Just Dr. Delgado and Felice, and J.P. and me. I had left the decision up to Delgado after he had met J.P. It didn't take him long to decide that Joseph P. Snell was just what he needed. J.P. had world wide facilities for tracing lost colonists, and he could be trusted as few men could with such a problem. For his part, J.P. felt that Delgado's willingness to confide in him indicated peaceful and legitimate intentions on the part of the Kono expedition. The space liner that left the colonists should be back some time in the next decade, any year now. That's why Delgado wants to locate the other colonists.

In the meantime you can look for some sensational developments in television. In return for his help in locating the colonists, J.P. and I have been granted permission to copy the equipment in the yag. We've got a young electronics engineer working on some of the bugs that developed when I tried to translate it in terms of

electrical units. He thinks I'm an inventive genius. According to Dr. Delgado, one of my ancestors did have quite a bit to do with it. So I let him think so.

J.P. put down his coffee cup and got out his gold pencil and a folding map. "As a wedding present," he said casually, "I'm going to give you and Felice a trip to—"

"No," I said coldly. "You can put away your map and your pencil. I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to settle down right here. It's time I had a little domestic bliss."

Felice shook her head emphatically. "We don't go now," she said.

"In that case," J.P. said, "it looks as though Dr. Delgado and I will have to go."

"I'm in favor of it," I said. "We'll stay here, and you and Dr. Delgado can go on our honeymoon."

"I thought you might like to be the first to greet some cousins of yours," J.P. said slyly. "Name of O'Rourke. Thirteen in the family."

"Is it true?" Dr. Delgado breathed. "You have located one already?"

"In Ireland." J.P. nodded and cocked an eye at me. "I recognized the traits. It must be the Irish strain that does it. The whole family has a terrible reputation for lawbreaking. In fact they behave just like Mike, and then the whole kit and caboodle of them apparently vanish into thin air, so that the local law has quit trying to capture them. I think it's time somebody did a little missionary work there."

"What are you talking about?" I yelled. "Lawbreaking! I'll bet they're the finest people in the whole country. Why, I'll bet—where do they live?"

"Right there." He jabbed the map with his gold pencil. "It's beautiful country. Lovely place for a honeymoon. Of course, if the O'Rourkes

were too wild, you wouldn't want to tangle with them at a time like that. You could just leave quietly, and—"

"We go!" Felice decided for me.

"We go now, huh?"

"Sure. What's a dozen O'Rourkes. They're half Konoese, aren't they? Sure, we'll visit 'em. And the next time they want to vanish, they can come over here in their yag, and visit us. Here—where you going, Felice?"

"Get mine coat. We go now, huh?"

"Well, not tonight, no. In the morning, maybe. How about it, J. P.?"

"The arrangements are all completed; passports and all. Your private plane is waiting at the Washington airport. You didn't think I'd offer you a gift unless I had it ready, did you?"

"No. No, I know you better than that. You're quite a guy, J. P. If I didn't know better, I'd almost believe you had some Konoese blood yourself."

THE LOST CHORD

BY

LYNN STANDISH

PETER WINSTON'S long spare frame ambled slowly down the quiet street. His pensive face was set in lines of deep thought. The evening was warm, and late and beautiful, but it held no spell for him.

Let them laugh, he thought, the fools. "Horrible concatenation of sound," they'd said. "Who is this young man who thinks he can compose?" Clarence of the *Bugle* had asked sarcastically in his column, "he'd be better off at ditch-digging." No musical talent whatsoever."

All right, I'll show them. The damned critics know nothing anyhow. They laugh at me—at me!... why I could teach them more in a minute... Oh well, what's the use. They're the judges. But at least I have the satisfaction of doing a piece—*String Quartet In White* is just too new for them. They don't know modern music and dissonance leaves them cold.

The church loomed up before him, and on impulse he strode up the steps. It was rather an impressive edifice, but even in the vestibule, his tortured ego felt a spiritual calm, soothing his ragged nerves.

Peter was not religious in the full sense of the word, but he was sensitive enough to detect the peculiar atmosphere of calmness that seems to emanate from churches. He sat in a pew toward the rear and surveyed the impressive outlines of the church's interior, dimly lit though it was by the feeblest of night lights.

No one else was around. Peter climbed the steps to the choir and found himself in a large organ loft, holding a huge and modern power-driven organ.

Why not? he thought. Maybe no one is near. At worst they can only throw me out.

He flipped a button which started the blower and deep within the vitals of the instrument he could hear the whine of the motor as it started pumping air into the reservoir. Experimentally he touched a key and was rewarded by the sound of a subdued note.

He let his fingers ripple over the keys

and from the powerful lungs of the organ, the barest suggestion of a melody began. Softly at first, then more loudly, the combinations of chords separated until the essential theme of his composition began to flow from the pipes.

Peter grimaced. Something was wrong. He was playing the *White* just as he composed it, but it didn't sound the same at all. Instead of the affected dissonance which he had so laboriously written into the work, this new modification was a softening and a mellowing of the theme. At first he was displeased. Then something came to him. This was fine! This was musical!

It was his composition and it wasn't. Abruptly he stopped playing. His fingers left the keys and he rose from the bench. *But the organ didn't stop!* Peter stared for a long minute, then reached over and turned off the power switch. The melody died slowly as the pressure dropped. In fear Peter left the church rapidly.

He tried to account for the strange event, but he ceased after a short time. All that really filled his mind was the magnificence of the modified composition...

The famous Peter Winston, lion of the London socialities, was driving through West End, with Patricia Norrison. "There, darling," he said, "that's the spot. I went in there that night and got the idea for 'Quartet' on the organ. I've been afraid to go near the place ever since—afraid and yet attracted. Would you care to go in with me?"

The girl pressed her hand to her forehead. "I've a splitting headache, Peter," she said. "Let's not." She smiled wryly. "Besides it might break your luck."

Poor Peter, Patricia thought, I haven't the heart to tell him: Whatever could have happened? She remembered well how the newspapers had told of the German twenty-kilo bomb landing squarely in the organ loft and destroying the organist and his instrument during the Blitz! He must have been very ill that night...

THE BARRIER

BY

LEE OWENS

H E FELT gravity grab at his belly. The powerful clutching fingers reached for him and seemed momentarily to wrench his body apart.

Then the number one charge stopped and the rocket ceased acceleration. Larry felt sick and nauseated and it was only with effort that he prevented himself from vomiting.

Overhead through the glass port the sky was black. He knew he was in space now. He glanced at the radar altimeter—four hundred miles it read! And he was still rising. He'd go to another hundred before the inexorable hand of gravity would slow his velocity and send him downward. Then number two charge would have to be used.

Larry grinned wryly. It was a peculiar feeling. He'd gone farther and higher than any man before him. It would only be a matter of months before the rocket to the moon would be a reality. And maybe he'd pilot—it was almost a certainty, for that matter.

The slim steel shell he was riding was laden with instruments. Even now they were recording everything from temperature and pressure to radiation intensity and spore-condition.

Larry saw that he'd reached the height of his trajectory. In seconds he'd be in free fall. He switched on the second charge and the pulse of the rocket motor sounded

sweet in his ears.

Skillfully he handled the controls sending the rocket Earthward in a gentle glide. Soon he'd land. The world would know that space flight was practical.

Larry brought the rocket down without trouble. Crewmen tore the door open even as the hot tube hit the field.

The pilot stepped out confidently. The flush of victory was on his face. Man had conquered space and altitude.

"Get him to Medico," a young surgeon was saying, "We've got to give him the once over."

Larry Austin felt fine as they carried him to the infirmary for the routine check-up for radiation...

Major Clenton waited in the office. The tall, sad-looking medico, Dr. Captain Wilson walked slowly from the Examining room. He was shaking his head.

"Well..." Major Clenton asked without even using the question.

Wilson shrugged.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but it's too bad. That boy is one mass of radiated tissue. I don't know what he ran into up there, but he's been shot through so badly with gamma stuff that I'm afraid to have the technicians work on him. I'm afraid you boys aren't going to go to any more high altitudes, Major; there's an impassable barrier up there..."

ATAVISM!

BY

L. A. BURT

T HE PHILOSOPHER and the Scientist sat in the control room of the *Light*, smoking and sipping their drinks, speculating about what they'd find on the seventh planet of Alpha Centauri. No sound annoyed them for the Hyper-drive threw them in some twisted region of space and nullified all the laws of time and space. Their trip from Tellus would be a matter of hours...

But thirteen hundred years ago *The Ark* with six thousand human beings and a common atomic drive had set out for Alpha Centauri with the intention of colonizing it. Now they would find out what had happened. The Hyper-drive made that possible.

"I'm sure, Philo," said the Scientist, "that we'll find a blossomed civilization of such advancement and such beauty that we'll hardly believe it."

"No, Clan," said the Philosopher, "I'm afraid I must disagree with you." He inhaled deeply on his cigar. The fragrant aroma wafted itself through the control room. "I will wager that the colonists went through the same cycle of warlike actions as we had on Tellus and that in all likeli-

hood they've eliminated themselves."

"You haven't much faith in human beings."

"I have a great deal of faith—but I know human behavior."

The *Light* lurched slightly as the Hyper-drive cut out. Alpha Centauri's system popped onto the videos. The captain immediately cut into a conventional drive for the seventh planet.

Quickly the *Light* slid into the atmosphere. Rapidly it headed "earthward." Both the Philosopher and the Scientist peered eagerly at the video scanners.

The control room was silent as only forest and jungle came into the screen.

"Look!" exclaimed the scientist.

Eyes concentrated on the image. Spread before them was a mass of broken stonework, laced with strange structural shapes. And nothing living moved in the vast ruins. The Scientist turned toward the Philosopher and shook his head. "I'm afraid that human beings here remained all too human."

"I'm sorry," said the Philosopher, "terribly sorry..."

TOOTH OR CONSEQUENCES

By Robert Bloch

"Hello, Doc. Got a little job for you."
So fascinated was Dr. King at the fangs
protruding from the horrible mouth, that
he failed to hear the stranger's words



A good dentist can always fill a tooth. But how would he fix molars that weren't even there?

DOCTOR KING rose to his feet abruptly. His lonely vigil as night physician in the clinic was interrupted by a curious sound. A very curious sound. A *clicking* sound.

Harry Spencer stood in the doorway. He was the young dentist from the office down the hall. King knew him well, but now he stared curiously, wondering if Spencer had a pair of dice in his hand.

No dice. But Spencer moved slowly into the office, a look of dismay on his usually cheerful face.

"Do you hear that noise, Doctor?"

"Yes," said King. "Sort of a clicking, isn't it?"

"Clicking, hell!" gasped Harry Spencer. "That's my teeth chattering!"

"A dentist with chattering teeth," chuckled King. "That's a novelty." But his eyes held no smile as he scrutinized the agitated Spencer.

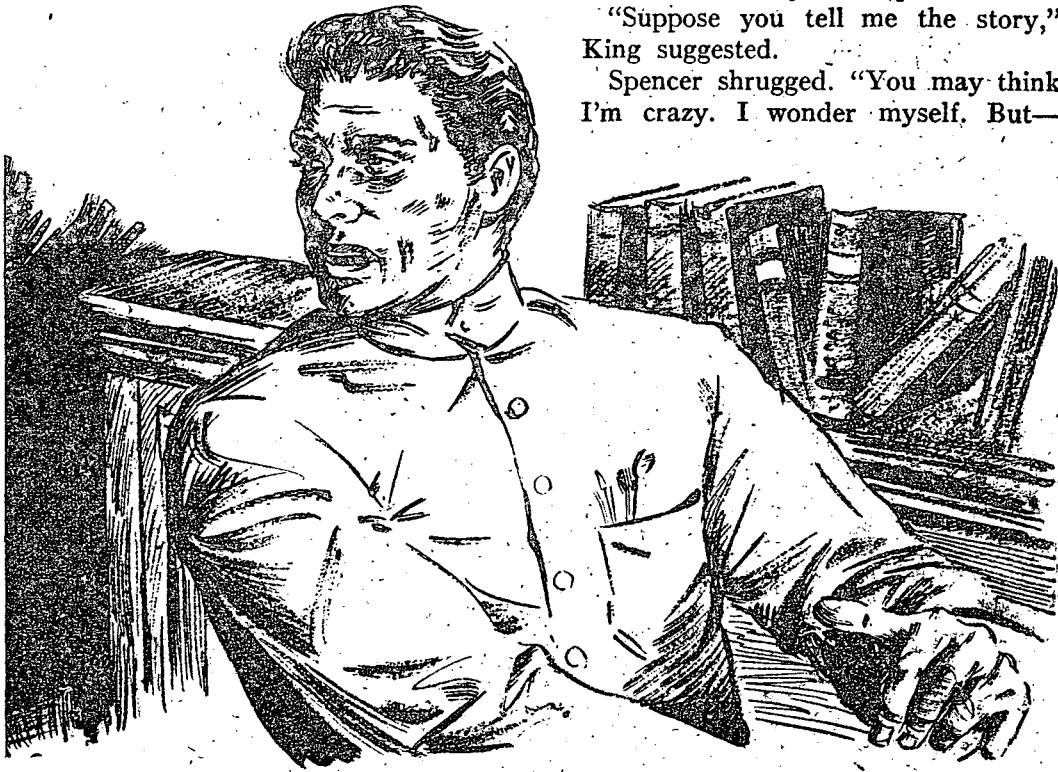
"Sit down— I'll get you a drink," he promised. And he did. Spencer gulped the whiskey gratefully. His teeth now clicked only against the glass.

"Better?"

"Much better, thank you. But Doctor— I didn't come in here for a drink. I need your help."

"Suppose you tell me the story," King suggested.

Spencer shrugged. "You may think I'm crazy. I wonder myself. But—



you asked for it."

King sat back as the young dentist began to speak.

"I had only one patient tonight. He came in about an hour ago. I'd dozed off in my chair, and when I looked around, this stranger was standing in front of me, smiling. He was a tall, dark man."

"Mae West type, eh?"

"You wouldn't joke about this guy if you saw him, Doctor. Or heard him talk. He looked—funny to me. Oh, nothing I could put my finger on. Just that he made me nervous, because he was so calm, so deliberate, so *cold*."

"He said his name was Vonier. Claimed to be a mill-worker. He was off the job at night, and he heard about the clinic so he came here to get some cavities filled."

"What's wrong with that?" asked King.

"Nothing. But he had a few ideas on how he wanted to be treated. He refused to fill out a patient's card with his name and address. He said that if he could come to me twice a week with no questions asked, he'd pay double for my work."

"Just an eccentric," King commented.

"Perhaps. But that no questions asked idea—that's bad. I realized that the minute I got him into the chair and took a look at his mouth. Then I wanted to ask questions."

Spencer shuddered.

"I wanted to ask him why his teeth were so large. So abnormally developed. Particularly the *biting* teeth."

Spencer shuddered.

King smiled. "Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother?" he suggested.

"I told you it sounds crazy," Spencer murmured. "But there was nothing funny about that stranger's teeth.

Like the fangs of a wolf, or a dog. That's what they were, I tell you! Fangs. Fangs in the throat of a stranger with cold, deep eyes."

"Have you been having trouble with your nerves recently?" asked King, smoothly.

"No—but I will have from now on. You see, I haven't told you the worst part yet. The part that made my own teeth misbehave."

"After I took my first inspection I got my hand-mirror to examine a bicuspid. I thrust it into his mouth for a back view."

"Go on."

"I put it into his mouth to see the reflection—and *there was nothing there!*"

"Nothing?"

"No reflection at all! It may sound foolish, but have you any idea of how horrible it was at the time? You do the natural thing and get the unnatural. Like—like turning on your cold water faucet and having a snake wriggle out."

"I backed away from the chair and told him to go away. Told him to come back tomorrow night—I wasn't feeling well. He just smiled and left, because he could see it was true. I *wasn't* feeling well at all. That's why I ran down the hall to you."

Doctor King grunted. Then he went to work.

"Hallucinations, eh?" he mumbled; as he helped remove Spencer's shirt. "Dizzy spells," he commented, busy-ing himself with a stethoscope. "Delusions," he chanted, applying arm-bands.

Then— "Aha, just as I thought! Nothing wrong with you at all Spencer, except perhaps a little high blood pressure. Here—take these. Three a day, one after every meal. Ought to fix you up perfectly."

"What are they?"

"Garlic pills. Perfectly harmless. Now, don't worry. Come in again at the end of the week. You ought to come around nicely if you'll just forget this little incident."

Spencer thanked him, pocketed his pills, and left the office. King had given him back his courage, and his pills were easy to swallow. His advice, though—that wasn't easy to swallow.

Spencer did his best to forget, but that night he had a dream: It was a dream about a stranger with deep dark eyes, and long, pointed teeth. The teeth chattered, and Spencer woke up and listened to the clicking in his own mouth.

HARRY SPENCER breezed into Doctor King's office with a hearty, "Hello, Doc!"

"Well, how's it going?"

"Swell. No trouble at all."

"Glad to hear it. No more—spells."

"Not at all. This Vonier fellow came in again this evening. I examined his teeth with the mirror."

"Reflection O.K.?"

"Of course. Say, Doc, I must have sounded like a fool when I came babbling in the other night."

"Nonsense. I appreciate your little problem. Now, perhaps, you can help me with one of mine."

"Certainly—what's up?"

"Nothing much. But maybe you could help me. It seems something has happened to our blood plasma stores."

"Your what?"

"You know we keep canned blood for transfusions here at the clinic. In case of factory accidents at the mill. Well, during the last week they tell me some of the cans have been disappearing."

"Stolen?"

"Apparently. And at night. There's

plenty of staff people on duty all day, but in the evenings there's no one here in the clinic but you and myself. The refrigerator is down in the annex corridor. Haven't noticed anyone prowling around, have you?"

Spencer shook his head.

"No. But that's funny. Stealing cans of blood. Could it be a practical joke?"

King turned to his desk as he spoke. "No—I don't think so. You see, I found one of the cans outside in the alley last night. It had been ripped open. Here, take a look. Tell me what you think."

He held out the gleaming metal container to Spencer.

Spencer stared at the corrugated edges of the can for a long moment.

"Somebody has been feeding wolfhounds," he said. "There are toothmarks on this can."

"Thought so," said King. "Well, there's nothing to worry about. I'm putting a new lock on the refrigerator."

"No," said Spencer, edging out of the office. "Nothing to worry about at all."

But on the way home he worried, just the same.

During the last week, blood had disappeared.

During the last week, Vonier had come to the clinic.

The long arm of coincidence?

Granted. The long arm of coincidence might sweep away a few cans of blood. But the long arm of coincidence didn't have any teeth in it. Teeth, biting into can tops. Long, pointed teeth, like the ones in Vonier's mouth.

The following evening Spencer took a look at those long, pointed teeth again.

Vonier came in quietly, sat down in the chair. Spencer tried to smile

professionally as he produced his mirror and made his inspection.

Then he gulped.

The mirror thrust in Vonier's mouth showed nothing, again. Nothing at all.

He went dizzy, for a moment, because he remembered there was a new lock on the refrigerator down the hall. And now there was no reflection in the mirror.

Vampires have no reflections.

After drinking blood, after absorbing the *humanity* of blood, they might become normally visible in mirrors for a short time. Vonier, sneaking in and ripping open cans with his teeth; drinking deep. Then coming into the office for dental work. Once before he had missed, somehow, and there had been no reflection. Now the refrigerator was locked, and again there was no reflection.

SPENCER stared down into the thin, pale face in the chair. His mind whirled as he stepped back. He nicked his thumb accidentally as one hand brushed the instruments on his table.

"You'll—you'll have to excuse me," he murmured. "Another spell, I'm afraid. You'd better come in again tomorrow."

The tall, dark man smiled, shrugged, arose from the chair.

Spencer couldn't help it. He sat down, closed his eyes. He heard Vonier's footsteps across the floor. His eyelids flickered momentarily—but he saw.

He saw Vonier bending over the white tile table, his head darting like a serpent's to the spot where the tiny red jet lay. His tongue lapped—and then Vonier grimaced with a look of curious pain.

Spencer sat there, trying to control

his shudderings as Vonier left the room.

Now it couldn't be denied.

The dark stranger with the long teeth, the bad teeth, was a vampire.

Abnormal teeth because of an abnormal diet. Why not?

It explained the decay, too. There was another explanation for the decay—an explanation involving sleeping all day in a terrible way. In a coffin, packed in grave-earth, hidden somewhere in the city.

Vonier, who came only at night. Who drank blood from cans. Whose reflection vanished when he had no nourishment.

"The blood is the life."

Of course he wouldn't allow his teeth to be pulled! A toothless vampire?

Naturally he wouldn't give his address. If Spencer tracked him down by day he knew what he'd find.

Certainly he had to grimace when he encountered the spot of Spencer's blood. Spencer was taking garlic pills, and vampires cannot endure garlic. Some authorities—Spencer shuddered when he thought of a demonolatrists as an *authority!*—said that garlic killed vampires. Why should it have such an effect?

Well, why is an allergy?

So there it was.

Spencer didn't sleep that night. Early in the morning he went down to the public library. He wanted to read certain books.

About silver bullets and stakes through hearts, and crucifixes and holy water.

About bodies that decay not in the tomb, and rest not.

About things that never die, that walk by night and drink deep from the throats of men.

About sunset to sunrise and pointed fangs and the legends of all na-

tions in all times.

Early that evening, he went in to Doctor King's office. He didn't have the courage to speak. King would accuse him of madness, in the stupid, melodramatic way in which people actually do accuse others of madness. The police would do nothing, and Spencer must keep still, keep the lock on the refrigerator door, keep thinking.

Doctor King gave him something to think about, all right.

"I'm out of those garlic pills right now, Spencer. Get another batch in Monday, I expect. It won't hurt you to wait a few days, I guess."

He guessed.

No garlic pills. No garlic in the bloodstream. And a *hungry* vampire!

Spencer backed out of the office, hurried down to his own quarters. "I must keep that refrigerator locked," he whispered. "I must. What if there's an accident and they need blood in a hurry and it's gone?"

Yes. But—*what if Vonier is hungry and goes for your neck?*

There was a solution to this problem, Spencer realized. He could run like hell.

He opened his office door with that resolve.

And the vampire walked in.

VONIER was tall, dark, thin. That's the way vampires are supposed to be—but so are a good third of all normal males.

Vonier was a foreigner with an accent. But there are many such in a mill town.

Vonier was pale. But Spencer was even paler, just now.

Now, it wasn't height, weight, complexion or accent that marked the vampire for what he was. It wasn't even the teeth; or the peculiar *faded* quality of his dark suit.

It was something about his lips. Lips that were thin, yet full. A paradox, unless you saw it. Lips that were used too much in partaking of nourishment, and became overly developed.

And of course, Vonier's eyes remained. Remained, staring sightlessly in death for twelve hours out of every twenty-four. Staring sightlessly at—what? No wonder they were dark and deep and knowing. No wonder they glared in hunger greater than human hunger. How long had they stared and hungered? How old was this creature?

Vampires are ageless and deathless until stake or silver strike their hearts into corruption. How many throats had been ripped before this thing discovered the blood transfusion cans in the refrigerator? How many would be ripped again, now that the cans were protected by a stout lock? And how soon?

Very soon, Spencer thought, unless he could act. For Mr. Vonier was quite pallid tonight. He was slow in his movements, almost drunkenly deliberate. Only his eyes were quick. Quick and hot, as they gazed at the dentist's throat with a desire he had never seen in human eyes before. An unimaginable desire.

"You're—late," Spencer choked out.

"I was held up," Vonier answered, with a little smile. "I had to do some shopping."

Shopping. That's what you do when you're *hungry*.

"Well, let's get started."

Vonier slid into the chair.

"What must you do tonight, Doctor?"

Spencer's voice trembled. He had to put this over. He had to.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Vonier, that some of those teeth must come out. If you'll let me make a cast of your

mouth now—just a wax impression—I can tell you in a jiffy where the trouble is.”

“Please, no. I am very sensitive. I do not wish for you to place anything in my mouth.”

What? No nice little plaster of paris cast that Spencer had worked on? No nice little plaster of paris cast, treated with liquid air, to harden immediately in the vampire’s mouth and clamp his teeth together forever?

That *was* a disappointment.

But there was plan number two. Spencer’s voice mastered a tremor. “Still, you’ll have to have a few extractions. Those lower left molars are pretty bad.”

“I do not wish—”

“I’m the Doctor! I’ll give you gas, so it won’t bother you. Those teeth are probably dead, anyway.”

Dead.

Vonier smiled, but Spencer didn’t like it. He got the gas going, fumbled with the tube and cone.

“Breathe deeply.”

Do dead men breathe?

The gates of Hell closed. Eyelids fluttered down over them.

He—it—was sleeping.

Now! Spencer was stern. Sure, they’d call it murder. But he must chance it.

HE FUMBLED with the drill. Put in the new head. The long steel bit he’d bought specially. The steel bit that was like a sharp splinter. Sharp as a stake. A stake to drive into the heart.

The drill buzzed. Spencer fed more gas into the creature that lay all white and still under the cold blue light; lay like a slick and glassy corpse in the morgue. Fill it with gas, and then drive that drill home into the heart—

Pulses pounding, he guided the

drill towards the rotten chest. One swift stab, now.

“Just a moment.”

The eyes flickered. Lightning. More lightning in the steel clutch of the long, cold hands.

“My teeth are not there, Doctor. You know that.”

“I—”

“You know a lot more, too. Don’t you, Doctor?”

Vonier sat up. The smile was full now, the long fangs exposed.

“You know why the blood was stolen, don’t you? You know about my teeth, too. You know why your garlic kept me off last night. Isn’t that so, Doctor?”

“Y-yes.” Spencer said it the way men used to when the Inquisitors tightened the rack.

“Ah. Then don’t you know that one of—us—cannot be killed by poison, or bullet, or sword? That fire does not consume us when we walk, nor gas drug our senses?”

Spencer realized the truth too late. Much too late.

“Who has locked the refrigerator?”

A soft voice. Soft as the clinging caress of a serpent. And as cold.

“I don’t know. The clinic doctors must have the key.”

“Get it for me tomorrow. You know why. I will have it or you will provide me with nourishment.”

“Garlic—” Spencer began. It took courage to say anything without screaming.

The vampire smiled. “I think not. Something has happened to your supply of garlic; hasn’t it?”

“How do you know?”

Mr. Vonier’s answer was quite dreadful. “The *carnivorae*, my dear Doctor, have a very acute sense of smell.”

The black-clad figure slid from the chair, moved towards the door. Then

Vonier turned. Spencer looked into a haggard white face. There was hunger there—but for the first time he read something inherent in all starvation. A kind of pathos.

"I don't like this," Mr. Vonier said, softly. "You must believe that, Doctor. I was—normal—once. It's what psychiatrists might call a compulsion, you know. A compulsion. Something driving you.

"But that's beside the point, isn't it? You are not interested in the long years. The long nights. The longer days—"

Spencer stared, but Vonier regained his composure swiftly.

"I tried to fight it. I took blood from the cans, instead of in my *regular* way. But when you are denied food too long, you get hungry.

"Remember that. Give me the key tomorrow night—or I shall force my way to nourishment with my teeth. They are very sharp teeth, aren't they, Doctor? Good night."

The door closed.

Spencer didn't follow. He could have taken that last chance, trailed the vampire to its lair somewhere in the city, waited until daylight and entered with a stake.

But human beings are human beings. Sometimes they faint. Spencer did when the door closed.

IT WAS dawn when he came to. Dawn—of the last day.

Spencer didn't waver. If it wasn't his neck tonight, it would be somebody else's neck. He had to protect the blood supply, for he had seen the injured workmen roll in, their families clustering about them in moaning groups. They could not be denied. There was no way out unless he could find it himself.

The priest couldn't help him. It was noon when Spencer went to Father

Donnelly and gave him the refrigerator key to keep. He wanted to confess, but at the last moment he knew it would be no use. He just told Father Donnelly to keep the key for him.

He took a crucifix, too.

That might hold *it* off for a little while. The crucifix could not destroy, but like garlic, the shape held an allergy.

Then Spencer went home, took out his revolver, and began to mould a silver bullet.

The stake had failed. Garlic had failed. Gas had failed. Poison and fire wouldn't work. He couldn't pull the teeth or trap the mouth.

So mould a silver bullet.

Why should silver affect *them*? Perhaps it was the contact of silver with the blood stream. The blood circulates in 46 seconds. That is, in normal men. The physiology of vampires must be strange enough. Silver poisoned, silver might disturb elements of dead blood mingled with living blood.

The physiology of vampires...

Spencer believed in the silver bullet. He had to. It was the last resource of vampire legends and it had to work.

But it didn't.

Evidently legend was legend—legend from a day of rough pistols and muzzle-loaders. It was already dusk when Spencer realized he was beaten by ballistics. Mould and file as he would, the bullet wouldn't fit for firing.

And he had melted down the silver crucifix for the bullet!

It was the old story. Science against the Powers of Darkness, that sort of thing. And this time science had failed. Spencer smiled wryly. He wished he had the crucifix now. But with it or without it, he had his

rendezvous to keep.

How he walked to the clinic he never knew. Every step was a battle. But Vonier would be there, and if he didn't show up, Vonier would stalk abroad. Stalk abroad and drink—

Spencer hurried in. No weapons now. He knew what this meant. He was walking the Last Mile when he went down the hall to his office.

He sat there counting the minutes. Silver bullets shooting into Time. Silver bullets and a silver key and a silver crucifix. 46 seconds, and the physiology of a vampire...

The door opened.

Vonier.

He didn't say anything. He didn't need to. Spencer read it in his eyes, read the hunger blazing there.

The smile in the pale face, the ageless face, was sardonic.

"I have two cavities to fill tonight, Doctor. One in my teeth and one in my stomach."

Spencer almost laughed. There was a jest—with teeth in it.

"Before we proceed, please, will you take a look at this one here? It's very painful."

Harry Spencer's most difficult patient climbed into the chair, and like an ordinary mortal, indicated a yellow fang. His long, talon-like finger fumbled in his mouth.

"*Zhiz un eer.*"

Just another patient, indicating the source of his pain. Just another—

Spencer looked at the infected incisor. Enamel decay. Cavity. Against the roots, deep.

Fill the teeth of the creature that was to kill him? Anything! Just to stall, stall for time, stall against the question of where the key was. Perhaps the creature thought he had brought the key. Perhaps these last few moments might suggest a way out.

Harry Spencer was, after all, a professional man. He gave his patient's teeth a professional examination. He would give this tooth a professional filling.

"Lose the fear in routine. It's just another patient."

Spencer's brain mumbled to him, then shivered in fear as he looked into the deep eyes of Vonier, saw what waited there, what lurked in hunger.

HIS FINGERS didn't tremble as he drilled. How he longed to plunge that drill down the red throat—into the lungs from which welled an odour of unspeakable corruption! But it would do no good. Vampires do not die by steel.

His fingers didn't tremble as he turned away and compounded the filling.

But they did tremble as he packed it into the enlarged cavity. For a moment his pick slipped, and he cut a tiny nick in the gum of the creature as he finished the job. A little gout of blood welled, and Vonier winced in pain. But the filling was in place.

Vonier sat up. "There, now." His voice was hoarse with a hunger no longer concealed. "And now, Doctor—if you'll just hand over that key?"

He read the answer in Spencer's eyes, read it in Spencer's beaded forehead.

The vampire rose swiftly.

Arms wound about Spencer's body, tight as the grip of shrouds. Fingers like white worms writhed into Spencer's throat, bending him back.

Clothes smelling of grave-earth, a breath of carrion, and through it all the white face burning bright, bending closer. Spencer saw the yellow fangs gleam, saw the teeth descend to his neck.

He fought desperately—but Vonier

held him as though he were a puppet with flailing arms. Vonier held him and the teeth descended.

Even at this last moment he could think about how long they were, and how sharp, and how they could sink into a throat and tear the life away.

The vampire ripped his head backwards, stabbed that mouth down into Spencer's neck—

And fell.

Spencer went down, too, when the grip was released. The creature was somewhere beneath him, groaning. Or was he? Groans died away, and Spencer stared at a litter on the rug.

Less than a minute since it had risen from the chair and gripped him. Less than a minute, and it was gone. Even the rotted clothing...

And it was less than a minute later that Doctor King walked into the room.

"Hello, Spencer. Just closed up the office for the night. Thought I'd drop in and see how you felt."

Spencer was busily engaged with a broom, sweeping up a little pile of powdery dust on the floor.

"Had a patient tonight?" King asked.

Spencer nodded. "He's gone though. Filled a tooth for him."

He stooped and picked something gleaming from the dust at his feet.

"Funny thing—the filling seems to have dropped out when he left. Careless of me."

"You're a bad dentist, eh?" King chuckled.

"No," said Spencer. He stared for a long moment at the tiny silver filling he held amidst the dust in his hand.

"No—I'd say I'm a damned good dentist, at that!"

THE COSMIC EYE

BY JON BARRY

THE ROCKETEERS at White Sands will soon be throwing up new probes into the sky. Because the nose of a rocket is not a very stable platform from which to measure radiation or from which to make celestial tests, an auxiliary instrument will ride with the super-altitude rockets.

The "eye" is simply a metal sphere with orifices in all three planes. Inside are powerful gyroscopes. When the rocket reaches an altitude of around sixty miles or so, the eye is ejected, and the instruments within it start observing and recording. Meanwhile the internal gyroscopes are spinning madly keeping the parachute-

supported sphere in perfectly rigid alignment. A dozen different instruments ranging from radiation detectors to temperature and pressure recorders will be working. And all the while a small four hundred megacycle transmitter keeps radiating so that the sphere may be tracked with radar. The parachute will send it to Earth fairly gently, laden with invaluable data.

To us who are anxious to see a rocket to the Moon get started, these scientific details are somewhat tedious—but we'll have to relax—they must come before the Lunar Special!

RED ATOMS

BY JUNE LURIE

THE INTERNATIONAL aspects of science are beautifully—if unfortunately—shown by the recent Russian development of the atomic bomb. Atoms and molecules have no creed or race and they will give up their secrets to anyone who probes for them spiritedly. We now know that we live in a world where two vast countries possess atomic energy.

It will probably be a long time before we know the details of the Russian undertaking, possibly never, and it will be fascinating to see how they did the trick. Anyone who has read the Smythe report

knows what a job it was, to build the first atomic bomb. Presumably, the Russians, with the advance knowledge, had less difficulty. Furthermore they didn't work with the handicap of not knowing whether or not it could be done. We did.

In what remote fastnesses, on what barren tundra, in which endless steppes, did the plants arise? Who did the work? How was it done? These questions pose interesting answers which someday we may find out. One thing we can be sure of; the American effort is undoubtedly being multiplied a thousand fold.

LET'S DO IT MY WAY

By E. K. Jarvis

Facing a ruthless foe is bad enough;
but when your leader is a coward, if
not worse . . . then what can you do?



Fenton, at sight of the Martian, felt his jaw drop. This was the one thing he had not taken into consideration . . .



LIEUTENANT RAK FENTON was master of the APOLLO when she slashed past the orbit of Mars, her jets flaring great yellow thrusts of power. For the faint span of time that the planet showed in the scope a cloud of memory blurred his mind. He knew the Low Canals of Mars too well, and memory laid its bleak hand across his heart.

Then the APOLLO was beyond. He set the controls on automatic, and turned toward his crew. Grimly he surveyed them. They were young and eager and as yet unaware of the true nature of their mission.

He said bluntly, "Effective today we go on three-H quarter rations."

"But—!" The mate, Miller, forgot himself in surprise. Then he stopped the protest and said smartly, "Yes, Sir." Smitty, the mechanic, and Wurtz, the radioman, stood with loose-jawed amazement, then stiffened themselves into resentful ramrods.

They were a good crew. The communications man, Wurtz, was as capable as any. Moreover, it was said that Smitty, the mechanic, could take two pipe cleaners and a welding torch and nurse a washtub around the tri-planet route.

The three saluted, too smartly to be this far out in space, and turned back to their stations. Rak knew what they were thinking. It was as clear as if they had spoken: "The Lieutenant is afraid. The easiest mission of them all and already he's lost his nerve."

The easiest mission! Rak smiled grimly and stared at the visiscreen. They were nearing the Asteroid Belt and he pressed the buttons that energized the supplementary meteor repellers.

The screen showed the lights of a fleet of fisher ships, searching for the rare asteroid jewels. As the fishers hung near the edge of the Asteroid Belt Rak could see the tiny flashes of their rocket powered nets.

In some measure, the sight of the asteroids cheered him. The crew would be eager, seeing them, for Solo Maneuvers in the "Belt" were a patrolman's joy. These maneuvers consisted normally of a month's time, spent in weaving in and out among the asteroids, blasting the smaller fragments out of existence with quick bursts from the pom pom rays in the bow, or hiding behind some mile thick asteroid, then pouncing forth to blow some imagined enemy to bits. By Terra! That was sport. That was hunting fit for a spaceman.

And so their work began. In addition

to keeping them on three quarter rations, Rak kept his crew in battle suits. They roamed the near edge of the asteroid belt for a week. At the end of that time the ship was like a hunting dog to his will.

He came upon two of his crew the eighth evening, without intent to eavesdrop. Wurtz was hunched down, smoking a pipe of fragrant Venusian tobacco, and Rak paused a moment, unnoticed, to savor the smoke.

He heard Smitty saying, "First three-quarter rations and now this damned haste. The Lieutenant will play things so safe he'll get in a week early, with half his rations left. I hate to blast off with a man afraid to take chances."

Wurtz took the pipe from his mouth. "I hear rumors of trouble with Mars. Could we be getting ready?"

Unwilling to listen longer, Rak moved; and when his motion caused them to look up in surprise, he said shortly, "You're both wrong." He singled out Wurtz for attention and added, "There's a cargo of special equipment in the aft hold. Break it out and figure how to mount it. It's mostly electronic and photoanalytic instruments." He moved on, aware of their astonishment.

He was satisfied now. They were as ready as time permitted. He moved to the controls, and accelerated the ship outward, toward the outer fringe of the Belt. Then he rang the bell that summoned the crew.

LOOKING at the assembled crew, Rak could feel their distrust as if it had been a physical thing. He ordered quickly; "Make yourselves at ease, gentlemen. I suggest you sit down."

When they were seated he said, "Your mission here is not the normal Solo Maneuver. Nothing could be

farther from the truth. You were not told at the time of departure for routine security reasons. With the Martian unrest it has been doubly necessary to exercise care." He broke off. Miller, the mate, was staring wide-eyed, past his right shoulder. He turned quickly, seeing the visiscreen. In the upper corner of the screen a space ship moved.

And what a ship! It was shaped like a truncated cone, as smooth as polished ebony. It was black, all black, and should have been invisible in the eternal night of space, except that a faint silver rim showed around it, like the silver at the dark edge of a cloud, outlining it in weird and awesome beauty.

No triplanet ship looked like that.

A chill unease filled the room. Rak smiled grimly. "That ship is the reason for our presence here. You see on the screen the strange ship mentioned in the last intelligence summary. Gentlemen, that ship is an *Alien*."

He could hear Smitty suck in his breath, then silence fell again. Wurtz stared at the screen, fascinated. Rak said harshly, "Our mission is to use our photo- and wave-analyzers on that Alien ship, and to use them at the time the Alien is using her own weapons."

Stunned, the crew seemed rooted to the ship's floor.

Rak said coldly, "The odds are not so great as you might think. We have perhaps one chance in a hundred. Let me review the facts as we have them:

"We are not at war with the Alien. She is not likely to fire at us unless fired upon, or until we attempt to photoanalyze her. No communication with the Alien has been established. The life form is unknown.

"Our speed and maneuverability, using the Harkness Accelerator, is much greater than that of the Alien. We can successfully run away. The report of the first contact proves that.

"The screens of the Alien are proof against any weapon mounted on this ship. They are not proof against planetary-based weapons. The first Alien ventured near Terra after the brush with our patrol ships. She failed to answer challenge, and was destroyed.

"The Alien's weapon is a strange vibratory ray which will penetrate our defenses. If we are under that enemy ray as long as ten seconds you and I and this ship will be nothing but glowing dust.

"The range of our detectors is far greater than that of the Alien," Rak concluded. "Are there questions, gentlemen?"

There were no questions. The task was impossible; they all knew that. They had to approach closely an invulnerable ship, draw the fire of a weapon against which they had no defense, photoanalyze the ship and weapon, and get away.

Smitty said, quickly, "Look! There's another ship, a Martian spacer. The kind important officials use." The Martian ship showed on the far corner of the screen. That meant the APOLLO, the Martian and the Alien were all some hours apart.

Rak said quickly, "Plot me all courses as quickly as you can. If that Martian ship is to come into detector range of the Alien, we must warn her."

Miller began the problem at the calculators. Rak sat at the screen watching the Martian ship grow. From the type of ship it was obvious that some important figure was aboard.

Miller said swiftly, "The two courses will come within forty-three Rudd units of each other. That should be well within range of even crude detectors. Our own course will intersect the Martian somewhat sooner."

Rak thought rapidly. Action, swift action, would be necessary. He ordered, "Get the crew in battle suits.

I'm going to use the Harkness Accelerator and intercept the Martian quickly. Wurtz, get them on the commo and make a rendezvous as soon as Miller can give you some co-ordinates."

Then he moved to the locker and donned his own battle suit, a rubber-like creation designed to protect the body against the tremendous acceleration of the Harkness.

THE TENSION in Rak's mind gave way to a feeling of satisfaction as the rendezvous with the Martian ship was accomplished without mishap. The Martian ship was the Phobos.

He took Wurtz with him, leaving Miller in charge of the APOLLO, and crossed to the Phobos in a space dory.

On the way Wurtz said thoughtfully, "The Phobos? Where have I heard that name?"

"It was in a telecast last week. She's the official ship assigned to Urgan."

Wurtz turned away and spat.

Rak said coldly, "Urgan's position entitles him to be treated with respect, whatever your personal opinion. Also remember that no mention of the Alien as such should be made."

They entered the lock of the Phobos, and minutes later were in the large command-and-instrument room of the Martian ship.

The captain of the ship was unimportant. Urgan was in control here and he left no doubt of that. His faint gray fur raised in anger and he roared at Rak in bitter Terran oaths. Rak could feel the anger rising in himself, felt the rigid stiffness of Wurtz beside him.

He said politely, "As you know, our patrol detector screens are much more sensitive than those of Martian ships. Your present course will bring you in contact with a contraterrene drift. I

suggest you modify your course."

"Contraterrene!" Urgan roared. He looked at Rak keenly and Rak wondered if he had really accepted the lie. He seemed more relieved than frightened. Rak wondered what devil's work was in process. He studied the Martian for a moment.

Urgan, with some differences, might have well been a Terran man. He was a big, light-boned example of the Martian homo, covered entirely with a faint gray fur. His eyes were as hard and bright as black diamonds. Urgan was the speaker of the Martian assembly. His power in political circles was equalled by his notoriety along the Low Canals.

Urgan asked, "You were on Solo Maneuvers here in the Belt?"

Rak said shortly, "Yes." Any other answer would have created a curiosity he wished to avoid.

"Good! Then as Speaker of the Martian Assembly I request that your ship accompany mine until this drift has passed beyond the asteroid belt. Obviously you have the equipment to safeguard us."

RAK'S MIND whirled. He was neatly trapped. He wondered if the trap had been intentional, or had grown by chance out of his lie. If he refused Urgan he would create an incident, and draw curiosity as to his real mission. If he obeyed the request he would lose the Alien.

As he pondered he heard the Martian captain ask quickly, "Do you think that is wise?"

The question had been asked in one of the obscure dialects of the Low Canals. Rak held his face wooden as though he had not understood. In truth not ten earthmen would have known that tongue. Rak had grown up along the Low Canals, for he was the son of one of the first Martian colonists.

He knew the dialects, the rages, the mad-dog nature of the Low Canal tribes.

Urgan said swiftly, also in dialect. "Of course, what can these fools suspect? We can still get the jewels before *The Day*."

Then Urgan was all smiles. He said in Terran, "Will you grant my request, Lieutenant?"

Rak said coldly, "You leave me little choice." Unable to conceal his irritation he whirled and said, "Let's go, Wurtz."

He heard Urgan's voice whispering after him in that dialect no Earthman was supposed to understand, "These Terran dogs. When I am Emperor such insolence will stop."

Rak entered the lock with Wurtz beside him. Wurtz said bitterly, "Nursemaid to that piece of space jetsam. What do we do now, Lieutenant?"

Rak stared at the controls of the space dory. As a commander he should never let his crew know he was without a plan. He said, "I'll let you know what to do when the time comes."

He pressed the controls, and the dory leaped out of the lock across space to the APOLLO.

RAK'S MIND was still whirling as he arrived at his station back on the APOLLO. He believed he understood the basic elements of Urgan's plan. Urgan planned a *coup d'etat* of the Martian government on *The Day*. For that day he would need money, quick money. He had come to the Asteroid Belt to get it, in the form of the tremendously valuable jewels. Rak thought he knew how Urgan planned to get the jewels.

The Asteroid fishers were well armed with small arms. However if a ship like Urgan's were to suddenly ray the after parts of a fisher ship, that

would open the fisher like a plugged watermelon, and unless the persons inside happened to be in space suits—Rak shuddered. Of course detection of such a crime and armed pursuit would be inevitable. But if *The Day* were soon, as soon as Urgan returned, then the patrol would not be fighting a pirate, but would come against The Emperor of Mars. The entire Martian battle fleet would then protect him.

It was a desperate gamble, but Urgan was known to be without fear, and the rewards for success would be the whole of Mars.

All that evening Rak wrestled with the problem, and dreamed of it that night. When he awoke he was no nearer a solution. He was awakened by the rattling of the space locks, and he rose quickly.

A knock sounded on his door. Curious at this early visit, he called, "Come in."

Urgan came in. He thanked Miller, who had shown him the way, then closed the door carefully and stood looking at Rak. Then he drew a needle gun and leveled it.

There was death behind that apparent nonchalance, Rak knew well.

Urgan said, in the Low Canal dialect, "I radioed the Martian Intelligence for a report on you. I understand you grew up along the Low Canals. That is unfortunate; you must have understood too much yesterday."

Rak's mind whirled, seeking some escape. His crew would be unsuspecting. A determined man could probably ray the three of them before they suspected treachery.

Rak said swiftly, also in the dialect, "A gardener does not break his spade. You have need for me."

The needle ray did not waver. "What do you mean?"

"You will need space captains in the weeks to come, you will need com-

manders who are loyal—" Rak's voice lowered, "loyal and *ambitious*."

Urgan grinned. "You are a Lieutenant, you want to be a Captain, is that it?"

Rak understood that grin. It meant that Urgan was sure he was bluffing. He said bluntly, "I want to be a Colonel."

That took the grin off of Urgan's face and made him consider. Urgan said slowly, "Considering your birth place, I think I believe you. It is unfortunate that I cannot afford to take chances." The needle ray aimed more carefully, and apprehension touched Rak with chill fingers. He said swiftly, fencing death with words, "About the jewels. You need those at once. You take quite a chance attacking the Asteroid fleet. I can show you how to avoid that chance."

Urgan said softly, "Keep talking."

"I was at the controls coming in. I saw a meteorite at the edge of the belt, a ruddy one like they found last year. You could see the edge of a jewel sticking out."

Urgan laughed. "And you didn't stop to try to pick it up? Do I look like a fool?"

"Should I have shared it with the crew? Why should I be so generous? I plotted its drift. On my watch last night while the crew was asleep I was going to pick it up. Then you asked us to stay on until the contraterrene drift had passed."

Rak could see the Martian considering that. Urgan said slowly, "You were irritated by my request. I remember that."

In his moment of hesitation Rak plunged forward, low and hard, his life riding on that surprise motion. He slashed at Urgan's wrist with the edge of his hand. The needle ray fell from Urgan's grip, and Rak put his foot on it. Urgan crouched, catlike, wait-

ing to use his foot in a swift jaw breaking kick when Rak stooped for the weapon.

Rak said, "I can call for my crew. You know that."

Urgan seemed to be weighing that. "Why don't you call them?" he asked.

Rak smiled meaningfully, "I would, but you see, I want to be a Colonel."

Urgan considered. The threat about the crew was true. "All right." He took one step backwards, and seated himself. He smiled at Rak quietly, as if they had been discussing the latest telebook.

Rak picked up the gun. He said, "I'll keep this," then he drew a notebook from his pocket and began to copy something therein. He gave Urgan this copy, saying, "The equation is that of the Asteroid's path. As you can see there is only drift to consider."

Urgan grunted and rose from the chair. He thrust the paper into a pocket of his clothing and asked, "How will you land the asteroid fragment. Have you a net?"

"No. I hoped to jockey alongside it and get it in the locks."

"We have one net aboard. Suppose you follow us. After all, your ship is armed, and you have the Harkness Accelerator. If I planned to steal the jewel I could hardly run away."

"That makes sense," Rak agreed.

"And now, my weapon." Urgan extended his hand for the piece.

"Sorry."

Urgan's eyes showed the faintest flicker of disappointment. Rak knew what he had hoped. He had hoped to ray Rak, and his crew, now that he had the location of the jewel.

Urgan turned to go back to his ship. Rak followed, watching him until he had cleared his space dory out of the APOLLO'S lock.

When Rak returned to his cabin he found his crew waiting for his return.

Rak could feel their animosity as he waited for an explanation. Miller said, "As the crew of this vessel we have no right to demand an explanation of the master's actions. But as members of the patrol, we have the right to protect it from treachery. We ask you, therefore, to answer a few questions."

Rak asked coldly, "What questions?"

"When Urgan came aboard he had his hand on a concealed weapon. I stood by outside your cabin in case I might be needed. You talked in Low Canal, you argued and then you agreed. I could tell that much from the tone of your voices. Last night you talked in your sleep. When I came to awaken you for watch you were raving about stealing asteroid jewels and making emperors."

Miller leaned forward. His voice was filled with suspicion. "We all ask you, what is your connection with Urgan? What have you to do with theft and emperors?"

Time was running thin. The sands were slipping down the glass. Rak drew out Urgan's weapon and said, "Here is my connection with Urgan. Consider yourselves all under arrest, for insubordination."

The crew stared back at him with hard eyes. Miller said quietly, "You dirty traitor."

Rak ordered quickly, "Put your weapons on the table. Miller, take the crew and begin immediate search of the outside of this ship and the lock, and any place that Urgan could have reached. Search for any form of sabotage. Hurry now, for we may have only minutes."

Then he thrust the captured weapons in his pockets and went out to take over manual control of the APOLLO.

The Phobos had already set out on the course that Rak had indicated. A

chill wind blew over him. That meant Urgan was putting distance between them. Probably Urgan had left a Magno bomb somewhere in this ship.

He began to play a game of hare and hounds with the Martian ship, following by leapfrogging from the cover of one asteroid to another.

This navigation was doubly difficult because he had to be alert for treachery on the part of his own crew. They would mutiny if given the chance. He had their weapons, and the key to the arms room. However; in time they could break in and get weapons.

Rak's stomach grew queasy. He wondered if it were the sudden changes in the ship's course, or if it were the thought of the desperate gamble he was taking. He heard Miller's feet behind him and whirled, hand on weapon.

Miller was puzzled. His attitude toward Rak was uncertain rather than dangerous. Miller said, "We found a magno bomb just outside the lock. I defused it."

Rak smiled. "Good. Now get the crew into battle suits and to their stations."

Puzzlement grew into wonder on Miller's face. From long habit he said, "Yes, Sir."

That posed another problem. Rak could not put on his own battle suit. As he donned the cumbersome suit he would be at the mercy of his suspicious crew, yet he would need the suit badly. If he had to use the Harkness Accelerator— He shuddered. He had seen bodies that had been unprotected against the Harkness.

He gave all his attention to this game of hare and hound he was playing. Tension grew in him. The time for action had come.

Behind him Miller reported, "Crew ready for action. I brought your suit, Sir."

For the faint span of a moment Rak considered. Had the finding of the bomb and his present obscure action brought Miller back to loyalty? He would need the suit, no doubt of that.

And then the visiscreen resolved his doubt. The dark bulk that had filled the screen slipped away as they rounded the asteroid that had been momentary cover.

Miller's breath was gasp of comprehension. Ahead of them the Phobos had swerved like a frightened hare.

She had, as Rak planned, intercepted the *Alien*. In the instant of sighting, Urgan had recognized that this was a trap, and the Martian ship swung broadside and let go all weapons in a coruscating flash of power. The *Alien* ship glowed in this power, undamaged, and aloof. A ray came out from the black ship, traveling slowly, so that the end of it could be seen, like a great fingertip reaching. It was an odd color, yellow green, like grass too long away from the sun, and it pulsed as it reached out. The reaching finger touched the Phobos then winked out. The Phobos was gone, yet her shape remained. Gases faintly phosphorescent, laid a ghostly outline against the inked background of space.

In that instant Rak turned on the Harkness. He felt as if a giant hand seized him, and crushed him until his chest was a million spears of pain. His voice shrill with unbearable agony, he screamed once before the blackness came.

Dimly, out of aeons of agony, light came to his eyes. He blinked up at the light, and set his teeth as pain

twinged again. He could discern Miller above him; then he felt the touch of a needle in his shoulder, and drowsiness pushed against the pain, moving it back in a slow tide.

The second time he opened his eyes the pain had dropped into a gnawing background. He could see Miller this time, but was unable to speak.

Miller smiled down, answering the unspoken question. "You've been here a week. You're in bad shape, but you'll make it. We're on the way to Base hospital."

Rak struggled with the question, but the rawness of his throat would not let the words come. He begged Miller with his eyes.

Miller understood. He said, "Wurtz was at the analyzer when the *Alien* fired. We have everything, photographs, spectra, wave analyses, even some of the residue of the Phobos. Wurtz got it all, just before you used the Harkness. With luck our scientists will be able to figure out the *Alien's* weapon and her screens." Miller smiled, "Mission accomplished." Then he thrust another needle into Rak's arm, and drowsiness crept gradually back.

Dimly, Rak heard the voices of the crew at the door to his room. In the no man's land of drowsiness he heard Smitty's voice, and the words told him that he had done more than accomplish his mission. The words told him that now and forever, this was his ship and his crew.

"How is the skipper," Smitty asked. "How's the Old Man?"

THE END

REMEMBER "TOFFEE" — FANTASY'S MOST FASCINATING FEMALE?

She's returning in a full-length novel!!!

THE SHADES OF TOFFEE

By Charles F. Myers

In the June issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

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WE ARE REBORN - - -

BY
JOHN WESTON

THANK GOD that I can take out these few minutes to review and record our situation. It is now better than any time since the end of the War. And we have every hope of the eventual disappearance of the diseases and the plagues.

I spoke with Dr. Toomey, our chief biologist, and he says that as far as the tests can show, the air is gradually clearing. He predicts that in another two years, we of the Shelter, will be able to venture outside without safety suits or masks, nor will we have to bathe ourselves in the antiseptics.

It is now ten years since the War ended, leaving the Earth scarred with blasts of radiation and polluted and poisoned with deadly bacteriologicals. We have lived and supported a rudimentary civilization in this concrete and steel catacomb we call the "Shelter." We have had births and deaths. We have managed to raise food in hydroponic gardens, we have obtained power from coal and oil—and maybe next year from an atomic pile. We have successfully resisted the invasion of disease and radio-activity.

With this monumental undertaking succeeding as it is, perhaps it will be possible to reach out and explore. Surely other bands of survivors must have grouped together and fought their way to an exist-

ence as we did.

We filter our air, we don't venture outside this New Mexico tomb without safety suits, and we have built up a real and visible wall against the thousand and one bacteriological monstrosities the warring nations visited upon one another.

Surely we can be proud of our success. But we must not relax our vigilance for one moment. Death is ever-present, invisible and subtle—but real.

While the Cities are still uninhabitable—and will be—for tens of years, eventually we will be able to enter them and remove what we need. Much is not polluted with radio-actives. The cities contain nothing living and are vast tombs, but they cradle in themselves gigantic quantities of tools, books, instrument, imperishable foods, vehicles—everything—that bears witness to Man's former greatness.

What a day it will be—even though this may be unjustified optimistic thinking—when we of the Shelter, meet with other survivors of the Third—and Last—World War. We know that there will be no future wars—there are not enough people left to fight. But above all, everyone has suffered from that hideous insanity.

The prime law of the Shelter is now: "Good will toward all men..."

"LOOK — NEW HANDS!"

BY
A. T. KEDZIE

"COME IN, Mr. Smith," the doctor says. "As soon as I give you a thorough examination, we'll put the arm in the nutrient bath."

"Will it hurt?" comes the patient's inevitable question.

The doctor smiles. "Not at all. The process is a bit slow and tedious, and you'll be confined to the hospital for a while but isn't it worth it?"

"And how!" the patient agrees fervently, "Anytime I can get a new hand..."

That fantastic conversation is still just that—fantastic, but the time may come when it will be perfectly sound and serious. It is a known fact that certain lower forms of life—among them the crayfish—can grow limbs to replace those injured or torn off in fighting. This process of rebirth is common to the lower types of animal life. Why shouldn't it apply to the higher forms? Why isn't it possible for a mammal to re-grow a severed limb?

The biological laboratories are probing into these questions trying hard to get some clue. They know a wound will heal. Nature has shown that pretty effectively.

People are brought into hospitals from industrial and automotive accidents, badly ripped and torn to pieces. Surprisingly enough, a good proportion recover. Tissue has the faculty of knitting itself together. Since it can do that, why can't it go a step farther? Why can't it replace itself in the shape of an arm or leg?

Apparently there is no reason why it can't other than that a pattern of some kind doesn't exist for it to follow. Speculatively scientists have suggested that after we learn more about the nature of flesh, and more about the pattern of nerves, we may be able to do something along that line.

It may become a common thing of the future. A man has had an arm torn off. He goes to the hospital. Electronic mechanisms attached to the nerve-endings of his flesh serve as a guide and stimulus to the growth of new tissue. Bit by bit the arm is reformed. If a crayfish can do it why not a man?

It may not be just a dream, for dreams have a strange way of coming true...

★ ★ ★

The PSYCHE STEPS OUT

By
Gerald Vance



Even as Death licked out at Wilbur, his transformation had begun . . .

**Wilbur lacked the physique for love
and adventure. That's where his psyche
stepped in - with startling results . . .**

WILBUR WEENEY was precisely the type one would expect to find seated in a psychiatrist's office with an expression of dim foreboding on his face. Wilbur was narrow-shouldered, small and slender; and there was an air of instability and vagueness about him that indicated an inner disturbance of dark and ominous proportions.

Now Wilbur was in the office of one Dr. Werther Ringsword. The doctor was gazing at the paneled ceiling of his chastely expensive office with a speculative frown on his handsome features.

The tension was impressive.

Finally Wilbur cleared his throat nervously. He said, "Well?" Then he laughed at the banality of his comment, but the attempt at lightness ended in a shrill titter. He subsided in embarrassment.

"Oh, quite," Dr. Ringsword said,

transferring his gaze from the ceiling to Wilbur. He fingered his aristocratic beard and studied Wilbur for several moments in silence.

Then he said: "Mr. Weeney you have an extremely curious disturbance in your psyche. And, speaking frankly, I don't believe our present progress, or the lack of it, warrants our continuing these interviews."

"You mean I'm hopeless?" Wilbur said hopelessly.

"Well, there's always hope, isn't there?" the doctor said with a little chuckle.

"You mean this amnesia or whatever it is may just go away?" Wilbur said.

"That might happen," Dr. Ringsword said, weighing each word with care. "But it is extremely difficult to predict any *specific* development in your condition. You are apparently schizophrenic, catatonic and neurasthenic."



thenic in about equal parts."

"Very well balanced sort of person," Wilbur said, and laughed hollowly.

"Ah, but these attacks of yours don't reflect the symptoms of *any* of these states I mentioned," Dr. Ringsword said with an enthusiastic smile. "I'm doing a paper on it for the psychoanalysts' convention next year. Should be tremendously exciting. You're just unbelievably mixed-up, you know," he added with relish.

"I feel honored, of course," Wilbur said. "But what's going to happen to me? Am I going to keep having these amnesia spells?"

"They are not amnesia *spells*," Dr. Ringsword said tolerantly. "You simply do not have a good firm grip on yourself, Mr. Weeney, to put it in lay language. Your grasp on your psyche is quite slippery, if I may again use an inexact term. Your memory, your will, the whole of *you*, in short, has a nasty habit of slipping out of your body. Your body then exists like a Zombie's until your psyche chooses to return."

An unpleasant thought stuck Wilbur suddenly. "Well, supposing something should happen to my body while I—my psyche, that is—is away? Where would my psyche go?" Wilbur said, saddened at the picture of his psyche wandering about like a homeless waif.

"As a scientist I don't indulge in speculation," Dr. Ringsword said severely. This was not strictly true, for at the moment he was speculating on his next patient, a thrice-married blonde with lissom limbs and a languorous body, whose confidences were far more exciting and graphic than anything he had encountered in Kraft-Ebbing or the Kinsey Report. The doctor was bored with Wilbur and eager for the blonde. He fiddled with

his letter opener, a habit he couldn't control, and wished Wilbur would go away.

"Well, thanks for all your time," Wilbur said dolefully. "But don't you think we should keep on for just a few more weeks?"

"In a word, no," the doctor said firmly. "Perhaps you may improve if left to your own devices. I feel sure I can be of no more help to you. And now..." He stood and smiled at Wilbur with finality.

They shook hands and Wilbur was ushered into the reception room where he saw, without any particular interest, a tall voluptuous blonde put aside her magazine and smile up at the doctor...

DOWNSTAIRS, Wilbur walked for several blocks revolving in his mind the disastrous news he had received from the doctor. He searched fruitlessly for a ray of hope to relieve his predicament. The thing was a hopeless mess. He was obviously destined to go through life as unstable as a particle of U-235, with no hope for security, dependability, or adjustment.

The attacks had begun a year ago, coincidentally enough at the same time Wilbur had met Valerie O'Neill, a gamin, red-haired girl with whom he'd fallen happily in love. He had courted Valerie in his different fashion for several weeks and she seemed to be developing a fondness for him when, without warning, the first attack occurred.

They were dancing. Wilbur blanked out. He was "out" for the rest of the evening. Valerie told later that he had walked about like an automaton, silent, expressionless. She thought he was drunk.

It happened on three or four other occasions and Valerie, at first solicitous and concerned for him, began

to lose interest. She became withdrawn and evasive and they stopped seeing each other. Another young man at the office, a strapping, wavy-haired chap with a compelling manner toward women, had moved in and he and Valerie were now officially tabbed as a twosome.

It was a picture of unrelieved gloom that Wilbur saw stretching ahead of him, as he finally ended his aimless walking and returned to his office. He put his hat and coat in the cubbyhole he occupied and then made a trip to the water cooler with the hope of seeing Valerie.

She was at her desk adding a delightfully pleasant tone to the stern decor of the office. Valerie's red hair went well with her complexion, which was like that of vanilla ice cream, and with her figure, which was the kind that gets elderly millionaires into the headlines.

Wilbur sat on the edge of her desk and said hello. He didn't relish the idea of telling her that even the psychiatrists had given him up, but there was nothing else to say.

"Oh, Wilbur, I'm so sorry," Valerie said, when he finished his sad little tale. The compassion in her voice was genuine and Wilbur felt somewhat comforted.

"Well, maybe it will work itself out," he said, and then, encouraged by her sympathetic expression, he added: "Would you have dinner with me tonight, Valerie? It's been a long time since we've talked and—well I wish you would."

"I don't know, Wilbur. I've already made plans for this evening, but—"

"You certainly have, my dear," a voice behind Wilbur said cheerfully.

WILBUR sighed. He knew that the voice belonged to Brian Master-son, the young man with the wavy

hair and the compelling manner with women. Especially with Valerie.

Brian came around in front of Wilbur and beamed at him patronizingly.

"Trying to beat my time with Valerie, eh?" he said with a good-natured laugh. "I admire your good taste, of course, but I can hardly wish you any luck." He turned to Valerie, smiling confidently. "How about it? Are our plans on? Or off?"

"I was explaining to Wilbur we had a date," Valerie said, and there was a trace of annoyance in her manner. Wilbur hoped it would grow into something more appropriate—like distaste, for instance.

"Well, that's settled then," Brian said expansively. "Now what's with your psychiatrist, Wilbur? Has he found anything wrong with you yet?"

Wilbur's psychiatric treatments were a matter of office gossip, of course.

"No, not yet," Wilbur said.

"By God, I'm glad I'm normal," Brian said, smiling contentedly. "The last person I need to see is a psychiatrist."

"That's true," Wilbur said, eyeing him thoughtfully. "You need a mind, of course, before you can have trouble with it. See you later, Valerie."

He went back to his own office taking small comfort from the fact that he jabbed a pin into Brian's balloon-like ego. What did that accomplish?

Facing the work on his desk, the stacks of tiresomely familiar charts and graphs and forms, Wilbur found himself to be in a restless, rebellious mood. He smoked a cigarette and stared out the window at the gray office buildings and the blue sky.

He was having difficulty concentrating—one of the symptoms that usually preceded his loss of identity. Putting out the cigarette he stared fixed-

ly, deliberately at a tall office building directly before him, trying desperately to keep his mind on it. But that didn't help. His thoughts went skittering off like playful colts.

Wilbur had never had one of his attacks in the office and he dreaded the thought that he might be getting one now. That would fix things nicely!

Grabbing his hat and coat, he left the office and took an elevator down to the street. The feeling that accompanied his attacks was intense now. He felt that his mind—the very center of his “I”—was drifting restlessly at its moorings. That somewhere in the seas of his psyche a dark storm was blowing, a storm that might send him swirling off into strange and terrible regions.

Hurrying along the streets, Wilbur was unaware of the crowds, the stir and movement of the city, the shrill cacaphony of traffic, news vendors, police whistles.

He felt strangely and pleasantly detached from reality, as if his senses were retreating to some cool dim sanctuary, while his body, his small, unsatisfactory body, was remaining behind, shackled to reality.

He was drifting upward into white, filmy nothingness, to merge with the infinite and the indefinable. From a great echoing distance he heard, or seemed to hear, a shriek of brakes and the urgent blast of a policeman's whistle...

He felt a slight cushioned shock, more like a gentle cleavage, and then he was moving out and away toward the white space at sudden, exhilarating speed...

WILBUR'S next sensation was patently physical. Someone was tugging at his arm, shaking him gently but emphatically. A blurred, anx-

ious voice was speaking into his ear, but the words were indistinguishable.

He was lying on his back on a cold hard floor. There was a throbbing pain at the base of his skull. He struggled to a sitting position, assisted by a pair of unseen hands, and then gingerly touched the king-sized lump at the back of his head.

“Wow!” he said.

He heard voices and footsteps approaching and again he felt the tugging at his arm.

He opened one eye carefully.

It occurred to him immediately that there was something wrong with the focusing or mirroring mechanism of that eye.

He opened the other one.

It too was functioning queerly.

For approaching Wilbur—or what his playful eyes told him was approaching—was a party of colorfully dressed men and women and their clothes and elaborate coiffures were like nothing he had seen before—except, of course, in old paintings of French court life.

Someone in the party saw Wilbur and then one of the women screamed. They hurried forward.

Wilbur's senses were obviously behaving oddly. He was sitting on a cold stone floor in a long, high-ceiling corridor that was decorated with beautiful tapestries and mirrors with ornately carved, gold-tinted frames.

That, at least, *seemed* to be the case.

And the tugging at his arm continued. Wilbur turned and saw a stockily-built little man with honest homely features beside him attempting to help him to his feet.

There were tears of what appeared to be anger and anxiety in the little man's eyes, and his voice throbbed with passion as he whispered into Wilbur's ear.

Wilbur realized then with a sudden dismayed start that his ears had joined the plot against him. For the little man *seemed* to be speaking French—voluble, excited, but unmistakable French.

Wilbur knew the language from his college days and now he rather irrelevantly thanked Heaven that he had been a good conscientious student. He could make sense of what the little man was saying, although there was something odd about the language as the little man used it. It was archaic, full of obsolete forms and constructions. But Wilbur could understand it all right.

The little man was proclaiming it a foul shame that some misbegotten dastard had struck down from behind one Guy Fouchette. Wilbur wondered who this Guy Fouchette was, and marvelled at the coincidence he, himself, had been attacked in the same manner.

It was all very confusing.

The party of men and women were crowding about him now and he was helped to his feet. He felt faint and things were beginning to blur.

THROUGH the mists that were settling about him he got occasional clear images. One such image was that of a girl with troubled eyes who put a cool hand to his forehead. Another was of a smiling man, a tall, impeccably attired man, whose face was cold and brilliant as a sabre. This man was smiling at Wilbur. He seemed to think the situation was funny. Wilbur felt a stab of irritation. He saw no humor in the situation.

He heard this man say, in a cool, amused voice: "But where was the fabled fleetness and cunning of M. Fouchette? To be struck down like some addled sot! The people will have

difficulty seeing their hero in this role."

The little man at Wilbur's side scowled, but his voice was respectful as he said: "Bravery and skill are not proof against the coward's unseen attack, Your Excellency. Now, with your permission, I will take my master to his chambers."

Wilbur heard the girl say, "Take good care of him, Paul. Please."

That was all he remembered until he was assisted onto a deep, wonderfully comfortable bed. He relaxed and sighed gratefully. Above him he saw gleaming crystal chandeliers set with hundreds of softly glowing candles. Draperies adorned the wall, and he felt, rather than saw, heat from a great fireplace...

"You must sleep now," the little man called Paul said gently. "I will help you from your clothes."

The voice and words soothed Wilbur's aching, confused head. He closed his eyes and fell immediately into a deep sleep.

WILBUR awoke feeling refreshed and restored. The shining chandeliers gleamed above his head but the candles were out. Sunlight and cold air was coming through an aperture near the ceiling; but an open fire balanced the draft and the room was comfortable.

He sat up suddenly.

What in the name of Heaven had happened?

His mind flew back over the immediate past. The amnesia attack, the blast of the policeman's whistle, and then the cold corridor and the lump on his head. His hand moved instinctively and found the lump. Well! It was still there. Then the party of weirdly dressed people and the little man who spoke in archaic French. He recalled a girl with troubled eyes and

a man with a cold smile. And something about a Guy Fouchette.

What had happened?

Troubled and confused, he climbed off the bed and took stock of his surroundings. The chamber he was in was large and exquisitely furnished in the period of Louis XIV. There was a fortune in antiques here, he thought. The four-posted bed, the gilt-framed mirrors, the *escritoirs*—it was all fabulous.

He explored a short corridor that led him to a lavatory where he found a basin of warm water and racks containing scented soaps and linen. Above the basin hung a tall mirror, into which he glanced perfunctorily before deciding to make the best of the situation and wash up.

He soaped his hands and face and splashed warm water about with relish. Halfway through this operation he paused. A perplexed frown gathered above his eyes. For several moments he stood stock-still, reflecting uneasily on what he had seen in the mirror. But no! It couldn't be!

With a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach he turned quickly to the mirror, faced it defiantly.

"Goodness!" he gasped.

The image staring at him from the mirror was that of a handsome, curly-haired young man with lean intelligent features and deep gray eyes.

"Goodness!" Wilbur cried again, and spun about to see where this young man was standing.

But Wilbur was all alone—undeniably and completely alone—in the small lavatory.

Turning slowly and dazedly back to the mirror he tried to get a grip on his reeling senses.

"Hello," he said rather foolishly to the reflection.

The reflection followed his every move and change of expression with

microscopic fidelity.

Wilbur looked down at himself in a panic. He wore long silken hose and black slippers with silver buckles over the instep and his knee-length trousers were of white satin ornamented with clusters of seed pearls at the knee and waistline. His torso was bare.

Looking again into the mirror he saw with a faint stirring of pride that his shoulders were wide and his arms muscled like those of an athlete. His stomach was hard and flat.

FOR SEVERAL moments Wilbur stared at what was undeniably his reflection with a troubled frown. He made an experimental muscle with his right arm, and then with his left. He looked stern. He smiled. He waved cockily. The results were gratifying.

Slowly Wilbur began to smile, not to see the effect in the mirror this time, but as an expression of his mood.

Obviously something rather fantastic had happened to him, to Wilbur Weeney. He—Wilbur, of course—had been hit by a car or a truck at the instant his psyche was disassociating itself from its human cage and preparing for a jaunt into areas of its own choice.

And then the psyche had no place to return; and so it had found another habitation, another harbor—bridging time and space in the attempt.

Wilbur had a brief nostalgic ache at the realization that he would probably never see Valerie O'Neill again. She would never know what happened to him. Oh, yes. She'd think he was killed in an accident.

And then he wondered about this Guy Fouchette. Probably the blow at the base of his skull had killed *him*, and Wilbur's detached psyche had slipped in as Guy's was departing.

Well, that was life, Wilbur thought.

Wilbur was essentially a rational man. He had taken what came along all his life, because he hadn't been strong enough to take what he wanted. He adjusted quickly to circumstances because he felt helpless to alter them. Now, faced with a situation which might have floored a stronger man, Wilbur's elasticity came to his aid.

He had been snatched through time and space and transplanted into another man's body. Very well! He would make the best of it.

And so he stopped worrying and proceeded to wash his face and hands and dry them on a foamy linen towel. Then he strolled back to his bed chamber thinking of breakfast.

Actually, there was one other thought on his mind. He was thinking that he had made, unconsciously or not, a damn fine trade. Wilbur Weeney—his body, that is—was hardly a thing of beauty. But this Guy Fouchette—Wilbur whistled admiringly and flexed a bicep.

Yes, indeed. He'd done all right!

A timid knock sounded on the door and then it opened and a girl slipped into the room. She ran to him and threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, my darling," she whispered. "I've been so worried. Are you all right?"

"Well, sure," Wilbur said.

The girl clung tightly to him, her soft arms about his neck. She kissed him passionately on the lips.

"Now just a minute," Wilbur sputtered nervously. "You don't understand—"

"If you're all right there's nothing to understand," the girl said.

WILBUR extricated himself reluctantly from the girl's embrace. He recognized her then as the girl with the troubled eyes who had put a cool hand to his forehead. She

had softly curling brown hair, merry eyes and a slim exciting body. She wore a plum-colored dress that swirled about her slender ankles, and a bodice of fine lace.

And, Wilbur thought, she obviously loved this Guy Fouchette. And she thought *he* was Guy Fouchette. His cheeks were burning and he felt a variety of extremely pleasant sensations coursing through his body. But he couldn't take advantage of her natural mistake. Only a cad would take and use the love that was meant for another man. Wilbur wondered if with practice he could become a cad. Maybe if he worked hard...

"You will see me tonight?" the girl said swiftly.

"Well...yes," Wilbur said.

She smiled. "Until then. I'm expected now at Her Majesty's chambers."

Wilbur smiled too. Life was looking very interesting. He felt a pang of pity for Guy Fouchette. The poor guy had left a delightful deal.

Suddenly the girl's expression changed. "I can't help it," she said, and began to cry. "I try to be brave, but it's no use. I'm afraid and I can't help it."

"Why, what's there to be afraid of?"

"Oh, Guy, that's so like you! You've got so much courage. Even your death means nothing to you."

Wilbur felt his stomach contract unpleasantly. He looked at the girl sharply. "What's this?" he said.

"They'll kill you, Guy," she said, and now her voice was weary and bitter. "You'll be run through by a dozen blades by tomorrow night. The Duke of Devoir will see to that. You know it. The city of Paris knows it. Oh, why must you go ahead with this reckless plan? There are others who—" She stopped and attempted a smile. "Forgive me, Guy. I'm behav-

ing like a fool. There are no others to do it. There is only my Guy Fouchette."

"Is that so?" Wilbur said, resentfully. "That's a rather sweeping statement, I'd say."

"I don't know why you insist on doing it. Don't my tears move you at all?"

"As a matter of fact, they do," Wilbur said hastily.

"I'm afraid you're jesting," she said. "All Paris knows your recklessness, your determination."

"People change as they grow older," Wilbur said.

"You've given me hope," she whispered. "I must hurry now. Good-by, my love."

She kissed him hard on the mouth and slipped from the room.

Wilbur shook his head and let out his breath carefully. Things were happening a bit too fast. He felt groggy.

THE DOOR opened again and a little man hustled into the room—the same little man who had ministered to him the night before.

"Ah—you are better," he said cheerfully. "Good! I will bring you some food. How about some cheese, a loaf and a jug of wine, eh? Good?"

"Just a minute," Wilbur said, sitting on the edge of his bed. He studied the little man thoughtfully. "I want to talk to you."

"But of course, Master."

He was somewhat puzzled by Wilbur's manner; it was obvious. He was a sturdy fellow, built as uncompromisingly as a rain barrel, and with homely honest features and eyes that were alert and appraising. He was a man to count on, Wilbur felt. And he was no fool.

Wilbur cleared his throat. He wanted information badly. This talk of his dying, for instance. He had to get to

the bottom of that—and fast. He had not inherited a fine new body only to lose it through some foolish commitment of its original owner.

But he didn't know how to find out what he wanted to know. And then an idea occurred to him, an idea that was actually quite brilliant.

He said, "This bump on my head—it's affected my memory to some extent. I—I keep forgetting things."

The little man frowned. "That is bad. Shall I get the doctor? Maybe a blood-letting will help?"

"No, I think not," Wilbur said hastily.

"You forget, eh? Well, you remember me, don't you? Paul, your valet?"

"Oh, of course," Wilbur said. He felt he was making progress.

"You remember that we live in the city Palace of His Majesty, Louis XV, in the apartment of your uncle, the late and unlamented Count of Brian?"

"Well, naturally."

The little man was smiling now. "And you know that are Guy Fouchette, the finest blade in France, the delight of the ladies of the court, and the beloved of Josette Cabrier, hand-maiden to Madame du Barry?"

WILBUR was repeating these helpful facts to himself, trying to keep them in order. "Beloved of Josette, eh?" He smiled. "Ah, yes," he said, and affected what he hoped was a sophisticated and French expression.

It apparently was, for Paul grinned too and shook a finger at him. "Ah, you are the fine one," he chuckled. And then he added soberly, "She is a fine person, Master. Last night when you were struck down by one of those cowardly dogs of the Duke of Devoir, she was really prostrated. You remember, she was in the party that found you?"

"Yes, she stroked my brow," Wilbur said, fondly.

"That is right."

"Well, everything's pretty clear now."

"And you remember—" Paul stopped, his expression changing. "Forgive me, Master. I know you've told me to say nothing of it, but it is on my mind."

"What, for Heaven's sake?"

"That you must die," Paul said gently and turned away.

Wilbur stood up nervously. "That thought seems to be on everyone's mind," he said.

"But there is no other possibility!"

"You needn't be so defeatist about it!"

"But, Master," Paul said in a helpless voice. "You are going to attempt to rescue Damon de Morter. You'll fail, of course, and the Duke of Devour's men will slaughter you."

"Well, for Heaven's sake, if I'm going to fail, why am I making the attempt in the first place?"

"It is the gesture we need, Master."

"I'm opposed to gestures," Wilbur said. "Too theatrical."

"But the plan is made, Master."

"Well!" Wilbur paced the floor. "So I'm going to rescue this Damon de Morter and get killed in the process." He felt the stirrings of a faint and unfamiliar anger. He was certainly being badly used! Whipped across time and space into another man's body without a by-your-leave! And now he was expected to perform some quixotic spectacular gesture which patiently had no chance of succeeding.

"Your sacrifice will stir the people of Paris," Paul said in an intense voice.

"Nothing could interest me less, frankly," Wilbur said.

"But Master, you talk strangely," Paul said. "You—you are our only

hope. If you desert us—" He stopped and muttered, "I am forgetting myself, Master. It is your decision, of course..."

"Well, that's fine," Wilbur said, more cheerfully. "Now I'm beginning to develop an appetite..."

AFTER PAUL had brought him food and drink and applied a soothing poultice to the bump on his head, Wilbur returned to bed and slept for several hours. When he awoke, Paul was by his side and he saw that it was dark.

"And now the meeting?" Paul said, a trifle anxiously. It was apparent he didn't know what to expect from his Master.

Wilbur saw no reason for not adhering to the regular schedule of Guy Fouchette, so he agreed.

Paul brought him a fresh shirt, embroidered with exquisite lace at the cuffs and throat, and a jacket of shimmering velvet. While Wilbur was dressing he went to a rack on the wall and took a shining sword from several that hung there. He brought it back and extended it, hilt-first, to Wilbur, in an almost reverent gesture.

"And here is our best friend," he smiled. "Only *this*, I fear, will teach the nobles that the people are tired, cold, hungry—" he smiled significantly— "and dangerous."

"Oh, yes indeed," Wilbur said. He hung the sword gingerly at his waist. His first step caused it to swing between his legs, nearly causing him to trip.

"Tricky damn thing," he muttered.

Paul was frowning. "That blow, that cowardly blow, has undone your balance, I think."

"No, I'll be all right."

Paul brought him a cloak and three-cornered hat and they left the chamber. Outside the corridor was brightly

lighted with candelabra gleaming with thousands of candles, and the tapestries on the wall shone exquisitely in the soft illumination.

"It's beautiful," Wilbur said.

"Palaces are always beautiful," Paul said ironically.

"So? Why is that?"

"Because the people don't live in them."

They descended a gracious winding staircase that was carpeted luxuriously and the bannisters of which were intricately carven in artistic designs. On the lower floor they entered a main hallway where gaily dressed men and women were walking, and where liveried servants were distributing wine in golden cups. Some of the people waved to Wilbur and asked for his health. He smiled at everyone and said he felt fine.

Rounding a turn at the end of this hallway they came on an impressive couple strolling in the opposite direction. Wilbur recognized the man—he was the tall, frozen-faced character with the ironical smile. His companion was a gracious, glacial woman of perhaps forty, with hair and eyes as black as jet and skin as white as a gardenia petal.

"Your Excellency!" Paul said, and bowed from the waist.

The man ignored the salute. He smiled at Wilbur. "You're feeling better, I presume."

"Oh, I'm fine."

The woman smiled too, but her eyes remained cold. "We were so worried," she murmured.

"The palace guards have made a thorough search," the man said, shrugging.

"But, alas, were unsuccessful," the woman said.

Wilbur had the distinct and not pleasant sensation of being laughed at. It made him a little angry. There was

nothing funny about a lump the size of a golf ball on one's head.

THE MAN said gravely, "It would have been a great loss to the court if anything befell the brave and beloved Guy Fouchette." He shook his head slightly and smiled. "However, there is sometimes a blessing in even the most unfortunate occurrences. For instance, this example may cause you to reassess your political—ah—opinions in a more realistic light."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," the woman said, raising her eyebrows and tapping Wilbur on the arm with her fan. "Surely you can see now the reaction of your common man!" She laughed gaily. "They knock your brains out from behind at the first chance."

Wilbur was feeling bolder. "I'm not interested in the man who did the job," he said. "I want the man who hired him. And," he plunged on recklessly, "I have an idea who it was."

"Who?" the man said quickly.

Wilbur smiled in what he hoped was a dangerous manner. He couldn't know that the smile, as interpreted by the classic features of Guy Fouchette, was a thing of deadly beauty.

"You will know who it was when he disappears from our happy circle," Wilbur said, still smiling. "Come, Paul!"

"Ah, that is the old self," Paul said, as they went through a door leading to a courtyard of the palace. "You squeezed the soul of the Duke of Devoir this evening."

"The Duke of Devoir, eh? And the woman?"

"His companion." He made a face. "An icicle. Marie Didot, I believe is her name."

From the courtyard they entered a winding, narrow, cobble-stoned street that was littered with garbage and

filth of all varieties, and crowded with ragged, emaciated people: men, women and children, whose staring eyes fixed themselves on Wilbur's warm clothes with envious resentment.

"Make way!" Paul shouted. "It is Guy Fouchette who needs the road."

The name changed the people's manner. Some of them smiled at Wilbur. An old woman—an incredibly filthy bundle of rags—opened her toothless mouth and shouted, "God be with him and the people of France!"

There were faint cheers at this cry, but the voices were weak, and the sound they made was like that of dry papers being blown ahead of a cold winter wind. Wilbur realized that these poor human scraps were so weak from hunger and cold that they had not even the energy to shout.

Hurrying along the cold narrow streets he saw more misery and privation in a single block than he had known in all his previous life. The sick and dying were deserted in the streets, scrawny, wild-eyed children raced like rats through the filth for food, and crones crawled through the mud begging for help and crying to heaven in their cracked voices for the deliverance of death.

Several times during the short trip they made they were forced against the buildings by recklessly driven coaches. The drivers used their whips on the horses and the people in the streets with equal gusto, and the nobles within the carriages laughed at the sport.

It was a terrifying, bewildering journey and Wilbur sighed with relief when Paul pulled him into a passageway and hammered at a door at its end. It was opened by a grinning man in a leather jacket and they were instantly enveloped in a rush of noise and warmth.

INSIDE was a long, low-ceilinged tavern, with tables made of thick oaken planks running the length of the room. Smoke and the satisfyingly sour smell of wine mingled with the warm laughter and talk of the thirty or forty men who crowded the tavern from wall to wall.

Someone put a mug of wine in his hand and someone else led him to a chair. He was the center of a good-natured but respectful crowd that seemed eager to be near him, eager to satisfy his wants. He felt like a celebrity.

Paul shouted for silence and told the story of Wilbur's encounter with the Duke of Devoir. A great shout went up at the conclusion and hard hands hammered on Wilbur's back. More wine was brought.

Wilbur swigged it down, relishing the feeling of comradeship that permeated the room.

Finally, much later, a huge man with coarse features and the voice of an angel rose and began to speak.

He said: "The time of conversation and discussion is coming to an end, my friends. We have not asked the nobles for the sun or the moon—but only for the use of our fields that were given to us by a good God. Their answer has been a curse.

"We pay the onerous salt tax, the church tax, we pay taxes on the bread we make, the wine we drink, even when our daughters marry we must pay a tax."

A shout of anger from the crowd drowned out his words.

Wilbur felt suddenly homesick. This talk of taxes, endless taxes, brought back memories of America. He blinked back an unmanly tear.

"And what happens?" the giant continued, in a voice of thunder. "Our lot grows worse. The nobles pay no taxes. They squander what they col-

lect from our sweat and blood in the riotous living in their palaces; in sinecures to simple-minded princes of the blood. We cannot till our fields in peace without the knowledge that our labors will probably be interrupted by parties of horsemen galloping through our grain in pursuit of a half tame deer. And can we hunt the deer?"

"No!" The shout came from forty throats.

"The game belongs to the nobles! We must chain our dogs for fear they will start a rabbit and lay us open to prosecution for violating the law. We cannot even protect our families against the wolves—which also belong to the nobles! And in the city! There is no fuel, no food, death stalks us every minute of the day and night while our nobles, our grand and beautiful lords and masters, live in the palaces in luxurious comfort."

He stopped and suddenly raised his glass high. "Tomorrow Louis decides the fate of Damon—our voice and heart! Should the decision be so!" He made a vicious throat-cutting gesture. "Then we will look to Guy Fouchette!"

The cheer that rose was deafening. Hands thudded Wilbur on the back. Glasses were raised. Wine was splashed into his cup.

Wilbur, caught in the electric atmosphere of the moment, leaped to his feet. He raised his glass to the giant. They drank together. Cheers sounded. The giant hurled his glass to the floor. Wilbur did likewise.

Cheers.

The giant shouted: "And then we will look to the people of Paris as they take his sacrifice, his noble gesture, as a clarion call for revenge!"

There was more wine after that and more back-thumping. A slim scholarly-looking man with a gleaming bald head got Wilbur into a corner to talk

about the revolution in a place called America.

"It's a great success," the man kept saying. "We should have one, too. Now that Franklin of theirs, he is a man! A God!"

"You mean Franklin Roosevelt?"

"Benjamin Franklin," the bald headed man said, eyeing Wilbur oddly. "This Franklin Roosevelt! Who is he?"

"Democrat, great man, friend of the laboring man," Wilbur said, hiccupping. "A bit radical, some said. NRA, for instance. Court threw it out." Wilbur swilled more wine and patted the little man on the shoulder. "Eleanor's fine too. Great woman. Traveler. Great traveler."

The little man put his glass aside and left hastily.

Paul came to his side then and led him outside. The cold air blew the fog from his brain and he felt fine.

"Great bunch of fellows, there," he said genially to Paul. "Great bunch."

He felt fine.

They arrived at the palace without incident and Wilbur tumbled eagerly into bed. He had the vague feeling that he was supposed to meet someone tonight. But whom? Valerie? Course not! Valerie was back in America. Hell, she wasn't even born yet! That struck him as funny. He giggled and fell asleep.

THE NEXT morning Wilbur awoke with a hangover. Paul brought him breakfast and helped him shave and dress. By that time Wilbur was almost recuperated and he silently thanked the constitution of Guy Fouchette for that fact.

"Now!" Paul said. "The meeting with His Majesty. You are expected. You must try to save our Damon!"

"Tell me about Damon. I'm forgetful again this morning."

"He is a journalist, a spirited, reck-

less writer, whose pieces have stirred the city."

"And if I don't persuade the king to spare his life?"

"Well, there is little chance that you will."

"And then I'm supposed to make a spectacular attempt to save him personally. We both die then, singing an old French song, I presume."

"You sound bitter, Master," Paul said, in a troubled voice. "It is your decision, of course."

"Well, that's better. Let's go."

Paul escorted him to a pair of massive doors which were opened by two soldiers at Wilbur's knock. He stepped inside and the door was closed. Paul was left outside.

The anteroom in which Wilbur found himself was large and drafty, but delightfully decorated with tapestries, mirrors and masterfully designed furniture.

Ahead was an archway and beyond that he heard voices. He walked along until he came to the entrance of a bedroom which was dominated by an immense canopied bed. Reclining on the coverlet of satin was an agreeable looking young man, who wore an ermine robe pulled tightly about his throat. There was a tray at his side with the remains of breakfast on it. He waved languidly to Wilbur.

"Come in, my good Guy," he said in a pleasant voice.

Wilbur tagged him as the king, Louis XV. He tried to recall what history had decided about this monarch. The facts that came to mind were meager and related chiefly to the monarch's love life, which according to the verdict, had been discriminating, varied, and endless.

Standing about the bed was a group of important looking men: several purple-robed clergyman and a few alert, intelligent-seeming nobles, among which latter group the Duke of

Devoir stood out particularly. He was imposingly attired in white satin. He inclined his head a civil inch in Wilbur's direction but no expression played on his steel-hard features and no light warmed his cold eyes.

Louis ran a hand through his wavy brown hair and raised himself on one elbow with a petulant frown on his face. "Well, let's get down to business," he said. "I want your advice on what to do with this upstart—this Damon what's-his-name. I've got to do something but I don't want to spend all day talking about it. I'd rather play tennis, frankly."

One of the nobles said, "May I speak freely, Your Majesty?"

"Well, of course," Louis said, irritably. "That's what you're here for."

"Then I will be blunt. I'm for execution. You may wonder why I'm so cold-blooded." He stroked his plump chin and smiled. "It is because this attitude that is expressed so—admit it—so challengingly by Damon de Morter, the journalist, is no isolated disease peculiar to France. You know what has happened in the place they call America. And you know the fever sweeping England. All this talk of freedom, of rights, of *elections*—it's spreading everywhere like some diabolic plague that obliterates boundaries and borders in its destructive march. It must be met with stern measures. Damon is but one man. But he carries the germ to infect thousands! He must be destroyed."

"A sound summation," a clergyman said, nodding gravely. "This advocacy of disobedience to one's divinely appointed temporal and spiritual rulers is the beginning of chaos."

"Oh, sure, sure," Louis said in a bored voice. "But why can't we just keep this fellow in prison? Frankly, I don't like all this killing of people." He turned troubled eyes to Wilbur. "What do you say, Guy? You know

him and these people he writes for, and I know you've even attended their meetings. Forgetting your sympathy for the minute, and looking at the thing practically, what ought I to do?"

The Duke of Devoir raised his eyes to the ceiling. He said: "Guy Fouchette will of course say free the man. Free him so that he may continue to compose his feeling descriptions of Your Majesty's head on a pike."

"I asked him; not you," Louis said tartly.

The duke smiled. "Forgive me."

WILBUR was at a loss for words.

He knew however that it was damned important that he convince Louis to free this Damon. That would eliminate all this talk about the rescue, the gallant futile gesture. It behooved him to be eloquent.

"Look at it this way," he said, praying for inspiration. "If you kill this fellow you'll make a martyr of him. You'll dignify his writings and his position. And you'll indicate that you're scared silly of criticism. Kill him and you give courage to thousands of others. Also it will be a way of telling every neurotic in the city that an easy way to notoriety is simply to advocate the guillotine for the royal family."

"One minute!" A clergyman spoke in a troubled voice. "This word 'neurotic'. What is it?"

"Well—" Wilbur paused, regretting the reverse anachronism. "It means a person who is a little crazy."

"You think Damon is crazy?"

"He may well be."

"Ah!" The clergyman smiled at Louis. "There is the way! It is merciful to destroy the feeble-minded."

"I could exercise mercy on half my court then," Louis said drily. "That's no good."

"We are straying, it seems to me," the Duke of Devoir said in his crisp voice. "My opinion is this: you gain

nothing by temporizing with rebellion. And that is what we face. Make no mistake, Your Majesty, these are not idle complaints we hear blown about in the wind. They are the determined, insistent demands of those who wish to fatten themselves on royal blood. Kill Damon immediately. Kill his followers. Make the price of revolt high. Send your troops into the city and cut the heart from this seething monster that is the people." He paused, then smiled icily. "It is their heads or ours, and I have no inclination to contribute my classic features to the decoration of the city's walls."

A door opened as the Duke finished and a woman entered the room. She waved to the group about Louis' bed. "Business, business," she said, making a face. "It's too early in the day for anything but sleep."

The group smiled, and the Duke of Devoir bowed. "Madame du Barry," he said. "When you arrive there is nothing to talk of but you."

"I'll tell Marie of your gallantries, if you aren't careful," she said, smiling. She nodded to Guy. "And you broke a date with your Josette last night, I understand. That is hardly the way to a woman's heart, M. Fouchette."

"I was up all night with a sick friend," Wilbur said, inanely.

"And her name?" Madame du Barry said, and a laugh circled the group.

She sat down tailor-fashion on Louis' bed and took his hand. "Go on with your talk now, and I'll try not to be bored," she said.

Wilbur looked at the fabulous du Barry with frank interest. She was a young girl, not more than twenty, with a ripe sullen mouth and sensual features. Her figure was excellent and her clothes lavish: but he felt that beneath her girlish looks and expensive clothes was nothing but cheapness and cruelty.

"Well," said Louis, "let's get back to the problem. You put everything as unpleasantly as possible, Devoir, I know. But I suppose you have a point. It's a big fuss about nothing, I still think; but we'll kill the fellow if that's what you all think best."

"But just a minute," Wilbur said, suddenly angered. "Doesn't he get a chance to hear the charges against him, and to prepare some defense?"

Louis raised astonished eyebrows. "What an amazing idea," he said, laughing. "Of course, he doesn't, Guy."

"Oh, let's kill him and be done with it," Madame du Barry said, snuggling closer to Louis. "It's a nice gray day and we should kill someone because of that, if nothing else."

Louis patted her knee and took a bun from the tray at his side. "There is the only sensible reason advanced so far, gentlemen. And so I decide! Kill Damon at your pleasure, Devoir. And now, gentlemen, I'm going to get ready for tennis."

WILBUR was reluctant to return to his chambers, for he knew he would have to face Paul. He didn't want to see him yet; but he didn't know why.

He wandered about the halls of the palace for an hour or so, watching the pleasant luxury of the court life with a moody eye. Then, as he was seeking the way back to his own chambers he ran into Marie Didot, the Duke of Devoir's courtesan.

He nodded to her but she stopped him with a smile. "Don't run away," she said. "I know you don't like me, Guy. I wonder why."

"It has to do with your soul," Wilbur said gravely.

"What an odd man you are. We know there is no such thing today."

Wilbur started to pass on, but she dropped her fan on his arm. "You

know about Damon, of course?" she said.

"Of course. I was there."

"Would you come to my chambers for a glass of wine?" She smiled intimately. "Don't let your imagination run off with you. I want to talk about Damon, that's all."

"Well..."

The apartments of Marie Didot rivaled in splendor anything Wilbur had seen so far in Eighteenth Century France. Firelight shone on paintings by artists of immortal glory, and the immense rooms were softly lighted by thousands of candles. Rugs and tapestries and furniture were of unequalled richness.

"Sit over here," Marie said, waving to a curving Louis XIV couch in front of the fireplace. "I'll bring you wine..."

She returned ten or fifteen minutes later with a decanter and two long-stemmed goblets. Wilbur saw that she had changed into a garment of soft clinging satin. The firelight played flatteringly on the slender curves of her body and gleamed on the lean, aristocratic planes of her face.

She poured wine and handed Wilbur a goblet. Then she laughed and reclined against one end of the couch. Wilbur sat tensely upright on the opposite end and sipped the wine. It was Burgundy, smooth and heroic.

"What are you thinking of?" she said in a murmuring voice.

"Ever notice the way a fire makes you sleepy?" Wilbur said, brightly. "That's what I was thinking of, you know."

"You're not very flattering," she said, pouting.

She raised her foot in the air and said, "Oh," in a gay and surprised voice. The ribbons that secured her slipper were untied and hanging loose. "A task for a gentleman," she murmured, laughing, and rested her

neat foot on his knee. She pulled her dress half-way to her knee, displaying a slim bare ankle.

WILBUR swallowed a dry lump in his throat. He put his glass down and took the long ribbons in his hand. His fingers were extremely clumsy as he tied the ribbon back in place. He didn't know what it was that was causing the hot flush in his face—the wine, the open fire, or the slender ankle of Marie Didot that his fingers brushed against occasionally.

"Thank you, you clumsy boy," she laughed, when he'd finished. She did not move her foot from his knee. "Now let us talk about Damon," she said. "I wish he could be rescued, somehow, don't you?"

"Of course," Wilbur said, staring at her. "But I'm surprised to hear you say it."

"Loyalties are funny things," Marie said. "I have a loyalty, that is all. It supplies all the logic I need."

"Well, how can we do it," Wilbur said.

"You have no plan?"

"No. Yes, I mean. But I don't know the details."

"Maybe I could help?" Marie said excitedly. She straightened to a sitting position and caught his hands impulsively. "What is the plan?"

"I don't know. I'm going to rescue —" Wilbur stopped. "They *want* me to rescue him, I should say."

"They want you to, eh?"

"That seems to be the idea."

Marie kissed him suddenly. He felt her warm body touching his shoulder and he turned and put his arms about her and kissed her blindly.

She broke away abruptly. "We are mad," she whispered. "Devoir is returning any minute."

"Oh, dear," Wilbur said, and scrambled to his feet.

"You must flee!"

Wilbur found himself outside so suddenly that it took him a moment or two to realize where he was. Then he shook his head like a man coming up out of deep water and started for his chambers.

Paul was waiting for him.

"I know the news," he said. "It is everywhere. Damon is to die."

"Yes," Wilbur said tiredly. He sat on the bed and stared at the floor. "The Duke of Devoir has everyone scared silly. And the king would rather play tennis than run the country anyway."

"And so?"

WILBUR saw the question in Paul's homely features. For a few seconds he stared at the little man trying to discover what his feelings were; and in the silence he could hear Paul's patient breathing and the faint murmuring sounds that drifted up from the streets of Paris. He found himself thinking of those streets, of the people he had seen there.

He felt as if a tug-of-war was going on in his mind. He was a welter of contradictions, inconsistencies and opposite loyalties.

What could one man do? What avail was the puny defiance of a single soul?

"Why?" he asked. "Why must I save Damon? Or try to? What good would it do?"

"You don't have to," Paul said. "That is a decision you still must make. But your death could be the death of privilege in France."

"How?"

"You are loved, you are trusted. You, among all the nobles of Paris, have made our misery your concern. You treat us as human beings, as creatures with rights. Your death, in a glorious gesture of rescue, would be avenged. We need a spark! The material for a holocaust is on every

side! Give us the spark and we will light a torch of human liberty."

"I rather doubt it," Wilbur said dubiously. He felt confused and inadequate.

Paul turned away and walked to the door, but not before Wilbur had seen the disappointment in his face.

"Wait," he said.

"No, I will leave you," Paul said. He smiled. "You will make up your mind. It's a lot we ask. Everything, in fact. But we have no one else to ask."

Alone, Wilbur paced the floor nervously. He still had no intention of dying in a futile, spectacular gesture. But that seemed about the only way to make everyone happy.

A wave of nostalgia for his former life came over him and he sighed heavily. He had been a failure then, of course, his love for Valerie unrequited, his work dull and unimportant. But at least he'd been allowed to drift along that way. No one in the Twentieth Century hung around hinting that he get himself killed to prove some vague point. Not even Brian, the ass who loved Valerie.

He hadn't heard the door and so when he turned restlessly and saw Josette watching him he started in surprise. She was smiling.

"You didn't come last night," she said. "I—I waited till dawn."

"I'm sorry," Wilbur said, meaning it. He was obviously messing up Guy Fouchette's life. And this Fouchette, from what he'd gathered, was undoubtedly a nice fellow.

Josette put her hand lightly on his arm. "It doesn't matter, Guy. Stop looking so tragic."

"Well, I'm terribly sorry," he said awkwardly.

"I'm not," she said. "I've just talked to Paul. About Damon. I know you've changed your mind." He saw there were tears in her eyes. "I didn't want you to die," she said. "It was

selfish but I can't help it. I want you, Guy. Let France find another hero."

Wilbur said nothing, for there seemed nothing to say. It was all over, the decision was made. Paul obviously knew how he was thinking. But still Wilbur felt a strange and baffling pressure in him.

"Let's take a walk," he said, finally.

"In the garden?"

"No. Let's walk in the city."

Josette looked at him strangely. "All right," she said.

IT WAS dark as they walked slowly through the narrow streets leading away from the palace. Winter held the city in its grip. Puddles of scummy water were covered with ice, the mud was frozen in sharp ridges, and the wind screamed through the tunnel of the streets like a Banshee. The homes they passed were dark cheerless holes and the people in them were creatures from the Devil's nightmares.

"Why do you want to walk here?" Josette asked.

Wilbur thought about his answer for several moments. Then he sighed and said, "I don't know."

For an hour they trudged through the city, until Josette protested that her feet were numb. They started back then, moving more rapidly. Occasionally shouts of welcome sounded when people recognized Wilbur. One old man threw himself at his feet and tried to kiss his muddy boots. Wilbur helped him up and they continued on in silence. Finally they reached the side doors of the courtyard and went inside.

Josette looked up at him, her face a glowing flower in the darkness.

"I know you haven't changed your mind," she said.

The words were strange and mysterious, as if they came from across some great distance; but he knew them immediately. He had been liv-

ing with them for what seemed a long time.

"I suppose not," he said.

She was crying. She kissed him on the mouth, hard, and pressed a cold object into his hand. He felt the tears on her cold cheeks as she hugged him tightly.

"It wouldn't work," she said, and her voice was muffled against his chest. "You don't belong to me. You belong to France."

She turned from him swiftly and ran toward the palace. He followed her a few steps and then stopped and called her name. Her figure was a slim white blur in the darkness. He watched until it disappeared in the shadow of the palace and then he walked on slowly.

Later, Paul came to his room. He stopped inside the door, an appraising frown on his face.

"All right, all right," Wilbur said testily. "I'm going to save Damon."

"Ah!" Paul cried. He crossed the room and kissed Wilbur noisily on both cheeks. He was crying happily.

"This whole thing is getting messy," Wilbur said. He was feeling quite fatalistic, now the decision was made. After all, they could only kill him once. And then this tiresome farce would be over. And the people... well they might get a break after all.

"The plans are made," Paul said. "We have forged credentials to get you into the Bastille. Now listen..."

THE SHADOW of the Bastille lay symbolically across the city of Paris, as a pale moon was cut in half by one of its ugly minarets. Wilbur trudged across the square that led to the fortress with the conviction that he was the only person in the city crazy enough to be abroad on this coldly bitter night.

"Halt!" The word rang ominously and he saw moonlight glint on pol-

ished musketry. He thought, maybe it will happen right now and it will be over.

He halted.

"Who goes in the night?"

"It is Guy Fouchette on the King's business."

The corporal of the four-man guard advanced and looked at Guy suspiciously. And then he peered at the forged credentials.

"To see Damon de Morter, eh?"

"You've read the order, apparently!" Wilbur snapped.

"Pass on!"

He stepped aside and brought his musket up in salute. "Admit Guy Fouchette on the King's business," he bawled into the night.

A great door swung open to the accompaniment of a hideous clanking noise and Wilbur marched into the courtyard of the Bastille. A guard detached himself from the unit and led him over this square to a door in the side of the building. He grasped a huge iron ring and pulled the door open.

"Down these stairs, turn right and continue through the first archway."

He saluted.

Wilbur groped his way down the steps.

The door banged behind him.

He turned right at the foot of the steep steps and walked along the corridor with the spine-tingling feeling that the building was about to collapse on his head. Light gleamed ahead beyond an archway and he quickened his steps.

Suddenly he became aware of the taste of fear in his mouth. His hands were trembling and his heart leaped about inside the cage of his ribs like an imprisoned rabbit. He blew on his hands to warm them, but it didn't help. The cold was inside him with his fear.

Wilbur realized then with sickening dismay that he didn't want to die. His imagination painted a lurid picture of what was waiting for him—the soldier's onslaught, the leaping steel driving at him, the blades piercing his body and then the hot pain as his life's blood watered the cold stones.

But he kept advancing, moving slowly and fearfully now, until he reached the archway.

There was no sound but the running of water somewhere in the depths of the vast fortress and the sound of his own tortured breathing.

He passed under the archway and crept on toward the cell block.

And then he heard a foot scrape behind him. He squealed in terror and attempted to turn but something hard and cold descended against his right temple with jarring force. Pinwheels danced before his eyes and he felt himself falling into a merciful oblivion. He almost laughed aloud. It was over now. The heroic gesture had been made, and now he could rest for all eternity. There was a smile of pure relief on his face as he pitched forward and crashed to the stone floor...

WILBUR was wrong about that as he realized when his eyelids fluttered open in several moments. *This* was not eternity and there was no prospect of rest.

He was propped up on a rude bunk, his back resting against a damp stone wall. Several soldiers faced him in a grim semi-circle.

And in the respectful center of the soldiers stood the Duke of Devoir—and in the Duke's right hand was a long and shining sword, the point of which was held as steady as a point of light beneath Wilbur's chin.

He swallowed with difficulty and the surge of his adam's apple scraped against the point of the Duke's sword.

The Duke smiled icily. He was a commanding and terrible figure in the gloom of the cell. His cold face was as uncompromisingly molded as a mask of stone.

"The play acting is over," he said, in a flat decisive voice. "Marie of course told me of your romantic plans, and now you are going to die."

"—No!" Wilbur gasped.

"You prefer to live?" the duke said, smiling horribly.

"Well—yes!"

The sword's point came away from his throat. The duke put his foot on the edge of the bunk and rested his elbow on his knee. He leaned forward and chuckled deep in his throat.

"You are going to return to the court unharmed," he said. "I do not wish to make a martyr of you and incite the people. You will return to court and this juvenile incident will be closed. Is that agreeable to you?"

"Sure, that's fine," Wilbur said hastily. He was deriding himself now for being an utter, impossible fool! What had given him the idea *he* could accomplish anything courageous or heroic? He wore the body of a hero, yes! The body of Guy Fouchette! But he had his own soul, the soul of a toad!

The Duke smiled musingly. "The stories of your exploits, your bravery—I always felt they were exaggerated. I knew myself, for instance, to be the better swordsman. However, be that as it may. Understand me, Fouchette. You live by my grace. Displease me and you will join Damon in hell!"

"Damon?" Wilbur gasped. "Then, he's dead?"

"He has been dead for two weeks," Devoir said. "I took no chance on Louis' fickle-minded sympathies. He was killed immediately after his arrest."

"Oh dear," Wilbur said sadly.

"Now! You will tell your friends, or anyone who is inquisitive that you gave up tonight's mission because it was ridiculous. Do you understand? It was an amusing prank, you may say, but essentially absurd. You will not talk of danger, of risks, or difficulties. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes," Wilbur said.

The Duke suddenly snapped the point of his blade beneath Wilbur's chin. "I know this ugly mob of Paris," he said. "They will lie in the mud of their choice until they find a romantic figure to follow, or some heroic sacrifice to avenge. Then they might become—ah—troublesome. You, Fouchette, are not going to provide a spark to the fuel of their resentment. You will return to the court, a trifle, an idler, an amusing fellow who can live to a comfortable old age with discretion. Does that appeal to you?"

Wilbur's eyes were riveted to the deadly, gleaming point of Devoir's sword. It held him hypnotically. He bobbed his head automatically.

"Excellent!" The duke broke into sudden laughter. He nudged a soldier and pointed at Wilbur with the point of his sword. "There cringes the hope of France," he cried. "The people's hero. Take him back to his bed and tuck him in carefully."

The soldiers joined in with the Duke's laughter and two of them jerked Wilbur unceremoniously to his feet...

PAUL BURST into his apartment the next morning. He hurried to where Wilbur lay in bed and shook him by the arm. "What is this I hear?" he cried in a tragic voice. "That you abandoned your rescue of Damon? That you laughed about it, said it was a silly prank?"

Wilbur sat up, squirming under the intentness of Paul's gaze. "Well, it

did seem pretty foolish," he muttered, avoiding Paul's eyes. "Confound it," he cried, leaping to his feet and pacing the floor. "I'm just not the man for you. Don't look so tragic, for Heaven's sake." He stared at his sorrowful valet with a sudden anger. "Get yourself another hero! Get someone without a sense of humor though or he'll die laughing at your plans."

"Is Damon dead?" Paul whispered.

"Yes, he's dead."

"The people..." Paul turned away slowly, as if he bore a great burden on his shoulders. "Well, they lose again. Maybe they're used to it by now."

He left the room without looking at Wilbur and Wilbur discovered that his hands were shaking. He went into the lavatory and splashed water on his face and combed his hair. He avoided his reflection in the mirror; he couldn't meet his own eyes now. He felt hollow, empty. Why, he thought in anguish, had he been put in the body of a hero? Why not that of a beggar, a slave, a craven? Then his soul would have matched his body.

Dressing, Wilbur found a small hard object in the pocket of his breeches. He remembered then that it had been given to him by Josette the night before, and that he had put it away without looking at it. Now he drew it forth slowly, and saw that it was a plain brooch, faced with mother-of-pearl and inscribed with the words: *Love Always*. Underneath this message were two more words which had apparently been scratched in with the point of a pin. They were: *And Courage*.

Wilbur stared at the brooch for several moments and then he put it back in his pocket with a sigh. Josette's brooch and the words inscribed on it belonged to another era, to a time long past when he—he smiled

bitterly—when he was the hope of France.

What a ghastly joke!

Unable to bear the loneliness of his chambers any longer he walked out and through the corridors until he came to the great hall where Louis was accustomed to receive the lords and ladies of the court in the morning.

The hall was crowded. It was a noble room, brilliantly lighted, exquisitely furnished, adorned with a fortune in rugs and tapestries, and warmed by great fireplaces in every wall. Liveried servants passed through the gay groups with chocolate, tea, wine, and sweetened buns and cakes from the royal ovens. Dicing and cards attracted clusters of men and women to the corners of the room and a number of affairs of love were in varying stages of progress.

Here was the heart of the ruling class of France. Here the intrigues against the people were plotted, here the burdensome taxes were increased almost daily, and here favors were bought and sold, assignations were planned, and husband betrayed wife, wife betrayed lover, and lover betrayed mistress, in a biological helter-skelter that would have made the antics in a barnyard seem the height of decorum.

It was all very gay and jolly.

WILBUR drifted onto this splendid scene with a moody frown on his face. He saw the Duke of Devoir standing near Louis' low informal throne chatting with du Barry. Louis waved to Wilbur, and then turned and said something to the Duke of Devoir. They both laughed.

Wilbur got his back against a wall where he could watch the action. Several girls giggled at him and one called out: "Now that you're through playing Robin Hood, maybe you'll have time for us."

Marie Didot, wearing black lace and jewels, drifted over to him and Wilbur felt a hot flush of color mount in his face.

She laughed cynically and said, "And how is the hope of France this morning?"

The two young men at her side laughed and Wilbur muttered, "Fine."

She turned to one of the men and said, "You know of course, that Fouchette has given up his ambition to save the people. Oh, yes! He's discovered that he is much more suited for tying the ribbons on ladies' slippers. And that it's more fun." She grinned at him over her fan. "Don't be a stranger," she said and moved away.

Wilbur felt the muscles of his jaw tightening with anger against himself for having been such a blithering, adolescent, callow fool. For a kiss from such universally available lips he had blabbed all his plans about rescuing Damon.

Then his stomach contracted painfully as he saw Josette walking across the room. She was coming in his direction but when she saw him she turned and avoided his eyes. Her chin was held proudly in the air as she swept past him; but at that instant she turned quickly, hesitantly and their eyes met. In that second her pride and control crumbled, and in her face he saw all the loss and heart-break in the world. But she recovered her poise instantly and with her features composed and glacial she swept from the room.

Wilbur took her brooch from his pocket and stared at it gloomily. *Love Always—And Courage*. He read the words again and again. Sad, pitiful words!

But they weren't pitiful words to Josette, or to Paul. Nor to Guy Fouchette! To that breed they were strong, beautiful, exciting words, that

rang with honesty and truth.

Wilbur reflected despairingly that he had messed things up for everybody. He should never have inhabited this heroic body. Josette could have wept for the dead Guy Fouchette and enshrined his memory in her heart—but now she had to live with the fact that she had given her love to a trifler, a fool, a coward. That was what *he*, Wilbur Weeney, had done to Guy Fouchette. He had taken a noble reputation and transformed it into something for these royal poppinjays to sneer at, for the chippies of the court to smile about over their glasses.

If Guy Fouchette had lived...

WILBUR sighed. Guy Fouchette would not let the Duke of Devoir go unpunished. And these pampered noblemen battenning on the misery of the poor!

Guy-Fouchette would have drawn his sword with a spine-chilling flourish and marched across this hall with his boots ringing like thunder, and he would have placed himself before the throne of Louis and faced Devoir with flaming eyes.

He would have cried:

"En Garde! En garde, despoiler of France! Knave, coward, liar, thief! Prepare yourself for Hell!"

Wilbur suddenly found himself in the midst of an enormous throbbing silence.

He became aware that he was standing before the Duke of Devoir, his blade drawn and held above his head.

And then, with the force of a blow at the base of the neck, it came to him! He had done what Guy Fouchette would have done.

The die was cast!

"You idiot!" Devoir said in his cold emphatic voice. He gestured to his followers. "Disarm this madman before he injures someone."

Swords flashed as two men leaped at Wilbur. He backed away swiftly, avoiding their lunging, seeking blades. He didn't know where this skill came from, but his arm and mind and body were joined together in instinctive and deadly harmony.

Devoir's men lunged at him simultaneously but Wilbur slipped between them with swift, effortless grace. He parried a thrust brilliantly and ran his blade through the flesh of the soldier's forearm. Disengaging, he wheeled and disarmed the second soldier with one savage cut.

Applause rattled like gunfire about the room. The nobles drew back to form an arena as Devoir stepped away from the throne and calmly drew his blade.

"I shall oblige you, my impetuous friend," he said. *"En garde!"*

He attacked in slashing fury and Wilbur gave ground before the onslaught. Over Devoir's head he suddenly spied Paul, his face twisting with excitement.

He cried out: "This is for Damon, old friend! Tell the people of France the hour is here."

Tears were streaming from Paul's face as he gestured a farewell to Wilbur and rushed to spread the news.

Now Wilbur was learning the caliber of his opponent, and testing the strength and cunning of his arm. He did all this instinctively, in pure muscular reaction. His mind was far away. He was contemplating himself as a hero and it was a fine, sustaining feeling. He knew somehow that he was going to die, but that too was all right. He was gaining a significance in death that he had not known in life. And that was fine...

WITH A WIDE grin he suddenly switched to the offensive and with a series of blinding slashes and

thrusts drove Devoir the length of the hall, until his back was against the throne of Louis. Devoir fought desperately to keep his balance. A brilliant *riposte* saved him temporarily. He got himself into the clear and tried to resume the attack.

But Wilbur grew stronger as the fight progressed. He turned aside Devoir's lunges with ease, and his own attack became more solid, more confident with every exchange.

"For Damon!" he cried, thrusting savagely.

Devoir saved himself by the breadth of his blade.

"For Paul!" Wilbur shouted, thrusting again.

Devoir leaped backward with an involuntary cry.

"For Paul, for Josette, for the people of France!" Wilbur shouted joyously, thrusting again and again, and driving Devoir before him in disorganized retreat.

"You fool," Devoir gasped. "My men--will kill you. Stop now! Save yourself!"

"I have already saved myself," Wilbur cried, laughing. He parried Devoir's last feeble thrust.

"No!" Devoir panted.

Wilbur feinted him off balance and then, with a gentle smile, thrust his blade home!

There was a disbelieving gasp from the court. They had expected a duel and a pinking. But to have the most powerful man of France slain before their eyes was a thrill they hadn't expected.

Devoir's men, eight of them, were spurred into action. They ran toward Wilbur, drawing their blades.

"Come then and join your master," Wilbur taunted them. He parried a hasty thrust and ran the fellow through before the echo of his shout died away.

From somewhere beyond the great hall he heard a murmuring, swelling sound, a sound that was like the angry rumble of an awakened giant.

It grew slowly but solidly and drew closer. And then Wilbur recognized the sound for what it was—the voice of the people of Paris. They were awake, they had their spark, they were ready to—what was Paul's phrase—Ah yes! To light the torch of liberty.

Wilbur backed away from the semicircle of flashing blades, laughing aloud.

His death was bringing something else to life.

And then an amazing thing happened. Wilbur felt the first signs of the old familiar sensation that accompanied his loss of identity. His thoughts were growing vague, and he was unable to concentrate on anything—even the flashing swords.

His mind was once more drifting restlessly at its moorings. A storm was blowing up in the seas of his psyche. He was retreating to that dim cool sanctuary ahead of the wind...

He was falling and now he saw through the almost impenetrable white mists the flashing sword points driving for their mark...

But that had nothing to do with him, Wilbur Weeney. Neither did that tiny pin-prick of pain. That was not important now, for Wilbur was soaring, at blinding speed, into the pleasant, enveloping whiteness...

LIGHT AGAINST his eyelids caused him to awake. He struggled instinctively to a sitting position, raising his sword.

Devoir... and those blades...

"Oh, thank heavens," a relieved, breathless voice said.

"Yes, he's coming around, all right."

Wilbur opened his eyes and blinked. Strong sunlight poured onto his face.

He was in a narrow white bed, in a white room, wearing hospital pajamas.

Standing at his bed was a gray-haired man with kind, intelligent eyes. There was also a red-haired girl who was crying.

Wilbur swallowed painfully. Devoir... it was fading from his mind like the wispy tendrils of a dream. He tried to catch them, to hold onto that reality, but they eluded his grip and receded swiftly.

"Valerie..." He spoke the name tentatively.

"Yes, Wilbur. You're all right. You were in an accident. But you're fine. Isn't he, Doctor?"

"Of course," the doctor said. "But you were unconscious two days. Frankly, you had us a little worried."

"Oh!" Wilbur said.

He felt his head and closed his eyes. And-Josette? The court of Louis XV?

Slowly, reluctantly, he became aware of what had happened and he sighed heavily. He had not crossed swords with Devoir, nor heard the voice of the people of Paris. A dream...

The doctor said: "You can get dressed if you like now. Actually there's nothing at all wrong with you. But I'd like you to check back in a week or so to make sure."

Alone, Wilbur climbed out of bed and hurried to the mirror. Wilbur Weeney stared back at him—without a doubt. A small, narrow-shouldered man with mild eyes. But that didn't matter! Paul was a small man...

Wilbur suddenly put his hands to his face. He wanted to weep...

He dressed slowly and carefully and as he finished there was a gentle knock on the door. "Come in," he said listlessly.

It was Valerie.

She sat on the edge of his bed and crossed her pretty legs. She was pale,

he thought. And she seemed nervous.

"I'll bet you feel better now," she said.

"Oh, yes."

He turned from her and looked out the window, at the tremendous sweep of the city. It was a cold-hard uncompromising city. He again felt like weeping.

"Wilbur... I'd like to talk to you just a minute."

"Well, sure."

"I've thought about you—us—the last two days." Her voice was hurried, like a little girl's. "There was once something between us. I felt it anyway. And it's come back since you were hurt." She stopped and laughed lightly. "This isn't so easy. Can't you help a girl out, Wilbur?"

Wilbur stared out at the city for a moment or two and then he put both hands over his face.

It couldn't be.

Once—as Guy Fouchette—he'd been a hero. In a dream he'd been a hero. Worthy of Josette, Valerie, anybody! But that was in a dream.

He stood facing the window for a long time and when he turned he was alone in the room.

WILBUR checked out of the hospital and took a street car down to the neighborhood of his office. He got off several blocks away to walk the remaining distance. He had no desire to return to the office, or do anything at all. His mind was confused. His thoughts were a jumbled mix-up of the present and the past—the past he had lived in a dream.

Suddenly he stopped short. An object in the window of an antique shop had caught his eye. With a pounding heart he dashed inside and caught the proprietor by the arm.

"See, that one!" he shouted, pulling the man toward the window. "I must

"Well, it won't run away from us," the man said, disengaging himself from Wilbur rather petulantly. "I'll get it for you. It's just a trinket."

The man leaned over and lifted the object from a tray of similar pieces and handed it to Wilbur.

"There's a rather pretty story attached to it, as a matter of fact."

Wilbur didn't hear the words. He was staring in awe at the mother-of-pearl brooch. And at the words on it: *Love Always...And Courage.*

Josette's brooch—with the words she had put on for him alone.

It hadn't been a dream.

The proprietor said in an amused voice: "Most of these trinkets have a little story to go with them. You know, love and sacrifice, and the like. This one, it seems, was given by one Josette Carbrier..."

"To me," Wilbur muttered.

"Well hardly," the man laughed. "It was given to a chap named—let's see—Guy Fouchette, I believe it was. Guy Fouchette was a hero of some kind or other. Had something to do with the early days of the French Revolution." He smiled. "Probably not a word of truth in it, but it makes a nice story, don't you think?"

"It makes a beautiful story," Wilbur said softly. "You tell it very well, too. I'll take it, of course..."

He strode into his firm's office ten minutes later with a broad grin on his face. Friends smiled at him and he gave them a wave that was a thing of cavalier beauty.

Valerie was at her desk.

He strode toward her, smiling broadly, and his heels tapped briskly to the triumphant rhythm that was beating in his soul.

"Allons enfants de la Patrie..."

Valerie looked up at him with a puzzled expression. And then she began to smile as she saw all she needed

to know in his face.

"There are a few preliminaries," Wilbur said, snapping his fingers. "A ring and so forth."

Their hands met and they smiled into each other's eyes.

"Hey, just a minute!"

The voice was aggrieved and outraged; and it belonged, Wilbur saw, turning, to Brian—Brian of the wavy hair and even teeth.

"Well?" he said coolly.

"Well! You just happen to be getting awfully familiar with my girl."

Wilbur smiled, a rather cold smile. "Brian, I will forgive your inaccuracy this time. But watch it in the future. Valerie is *my* girl."

"Now look here—"

"Please! Wilbur raised a hand firmly. "I said I will forgive you—once! Should it happen again, I—"

"You'll what?"

Wilbur continued to smile as he picked up a letter-opener from the desk. He balanced it on his finger, and watched the light gleaming on its sharp edge. "Oh," he said casually, "I'll probably cut your heart out."

Brian started to bluster; but suddenly he felt a most unpleasant sensation in the pit of his stomach. Wilbur was looking at him with a light in his eye that was cold and speculative.

The letter-opener rocked gently on his finger.

Brian loosened his collar with one finger. "Well, of course," he said. "I—naturally."

He walked away rapidly.

Wilbur Weeney kissed Valerie in a fashion that made the other girls in the office sigh wistfully.

And then he gave her his arm and they left the office on what was obviously romantic business.

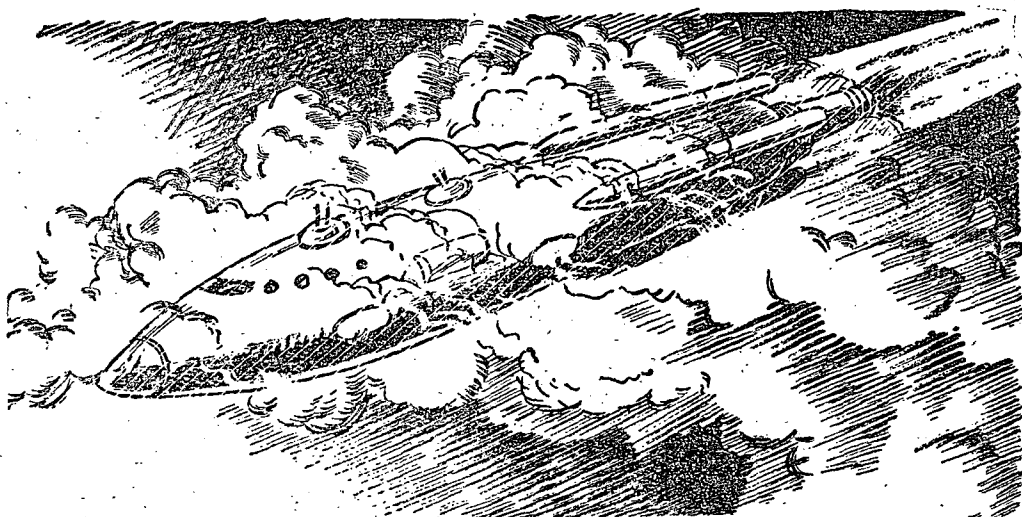
And Wilbur walked as if to the blare of unseen trumpets.

UNITED WE STAND

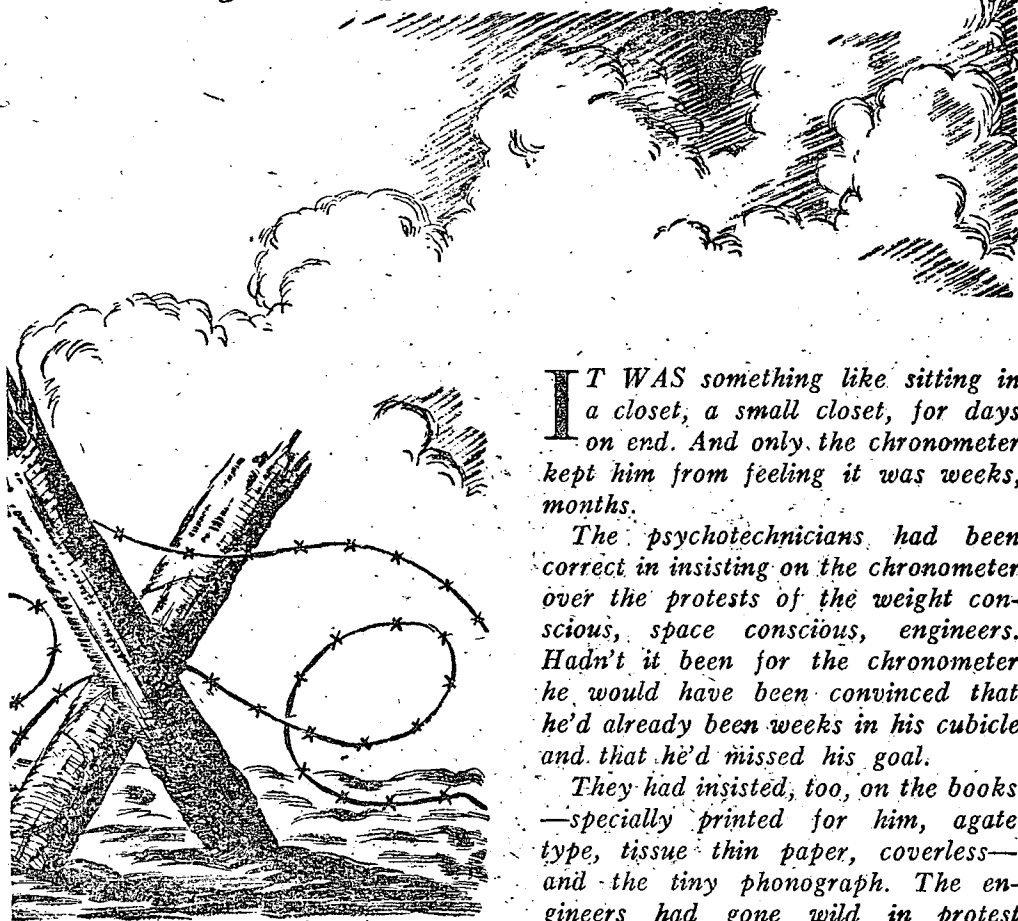
By Mack Reynolds



Earth's armies forgot their enmity at the appearance of this phantom ship



To save the peoples of Earth, a young man prepared to die a hero's death in the toughest way of all – without appreciation!



IT WAS something like sitting in a closet, a small closet, for days on end. And only the chronometer kept him from feeling it was weeks, months.

The psychotechnicians had been correct in insisting on the chronometer over the protests of the weight conscious, space conscious, engineers. Hadn't it been for the chronometer he would have been convinced that he'd already been weeks in his cubicle and that he'd missed his goal.

They had insisted, too, on the books—specially printed for him, agate type, tissue thin paper, coverless—and the tiny phonograph. The engineers had gone wild in protest

over the books and the phonograph, but the docs had been right. Without them he would have been raving mad by now. As it was, he had something to break the monotony of just sitting and waiting and thinking of the world he had left behind and the one he was approaching.

* * *

Excerpt from announcement by Arch Donnelly at Madison Square Garden, July 8: "Ladees and Gennulmun, before we bring you the principal bout of the evening, the contest for the Heavyweight Championship of the World, I would like to remind you that alone in space tonight, more than thirty-five million miles from the home he loves, Lieutenant Philip Albright is attempting the first flight from Luna to Mars."

"Ladees and Gennulmun, I am going to request that this here audience stand and hold a moment of silence in honor of an American hero who is carrying the stars and stripes to..."

* * *

From Associated Press: Moscow, July 8. — Commissar of Defense Andri Goroloff, in a statement today, accused the Western Alliance of taking steps that would inevitably lead to war. He contended that the establishment of bases upon Luna, and the further exploration of space toward Mars, were motivated solely by military expediency.

"Such bases," Commissar Goroloff is quoted as having said, "have no possible use save as launching points for guided missiles directed against the peace loving nations of the Eastern Confederation. They are a dagger directed against our hearts."

He warned, further, that the Eastern Confederation would not long stand for such preparations for aggression against it. "If to survive we must take countermeasures," he

warned, "we will not hesitate to..."

* * *

From the Washington World: Washington, D.C., July 9. — In calling for increased military appropriations, Senator Warren Miles scoffed today at Eastern Confederation claims that the Western Alliance was planning aggression. "To their twisted minds, preparations for defense are an attack," he said. "Actually, they would have the world confused on the point of just who are the wolves and who the lambs. It has been done before and we do not propose to..."

* * *

From Station KIO: We interrupt this program to bring you a bulletin from New Albuquerque, Luna, take-off point for Lieutenant Philip Albright in his attempt to reach Mars. General Arnold Dwight, commandant of the Luna base, has just announced that a radar message has been received from Lieutenant Albright reading: LANDED SAFELY MARS. Stay tuned to this station for further news of...

* * *

From New York Telegraph: Washington, D.C., July 10. — Sources close to the White House made known today that appropriations for further enlargement of the Western Alliance military base on Luna would undoubtedly be doubled within the week. The rapidly developing possibilities of space travel, emphasized by the report of Lieutenant Philip Albright's successful landing on Mars; and the military advantages of the Luna base, are generally believed to be the principal reasons for the step.

The steadily darkening international outlook has spurred defense measures...

* * *

Excerpt from broadcast of Commentator Roy George: "There is both good and bad news tonight, radio

friends. And here it is!

"First, we have just been handed a bulletin from New Albuquerque, American base on the moon. A further report has been received from Lieutenant Philip Albright, who landed a few hours ago on the planet Mars. You will recall that Lieutenant Albright is restricted in sending, due to the necessity of conserving power, but that he is able to receive communications from Luna at all times. His message is brief but startling, friends. It reads simply: **SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE**. No more than that, but how much it says.

"Our second bulletin comes from Long Island where the United Nations Assembly is in session and making desperate last moment efforts to avoid the outbreak of hostilities which seem, at times, only hours away. Secretary of State Fuller Martin, in a strong verbal attack upon the warlike moves of the Eastern Confederation, stated that under no circumstances would this nation accept a situation in which..."

* * *

From Station KIO: Station KIO brings you the latest news flashes every hour on the hour... New Albuquerque, Luna. Nothing further has been heard from Lieutenant Philip Albright who landed on Mars yesterday. It has been ten hours since his last message which reported briefly that he had discovered signs of intelligent life on what had supposed to be a dead planet. Meanwhile, here on earth, a storm of conjecture in scientific circles has been raised by his disclosure... London, England. Prime Minister Winston Clement, in a press conference today, revealed that the full strength of the British army and navy would be thrown into the conflict immediately, if and when hostilities break-out. He stressed the

fact that the colonies and dominions of the British Commonwealth are in complete accord with the...

* * *

From Station WBCD: We interrupt this program to bring you another flash from New Albuquerque, Luna. Lieutenant Philip Albright, first human to land upon another planet, has been heard from again. The message began, **MARTIANS ARE TAK...**, and broke off in the middle of the third word. It is unknown what caused the break in communication. Stay tuned to this station for...

* * *

From the Associated Press: Sofia, Bulgaria, July 11. —Premier Josep Kosloff, in a speech to cheering thousands gathered in a mass meeting in the city square today, announced that he has ordered the immediate mobilization of all Bulgarian forces.

* * *

From the United Press: Peiping, China, July 11. —Chu Maō, Commissioner of Defense, declared today that in the eventuality of hostilities between the Western Alliance and the Eastern Confederation, China would immediately march on all Southeastern Asia, "...as a measure of defense against the imperialistic powers of the West."

It is understood that the full military strength of Chu's armies has not been diminished since the recent termination of the civil war and that...

* * *

From Station KIO: Here's a news bulletin. President James Harford has just ordered that all stored elements of the American fleet be taken from "mothballs" and restored to active duty.

* * *

From the International News Services: Stockholm, Sweden, July 11. —

It was reliably reported today in diplomatic circles of this neutral capitol that Poland and Czechoslovakia have both secretly ordered mobilization of their forces to full war strength. There have also been rumors of divisions mobilizing upon the borders of Finland and Hungary, and large scale troop movements on the...

* * *

From the New York Telegraph: New Albuquerque, Luna, July 12. — There is still no further word from Lieutenant Philip Albright, whose last message from Mars was cut off after the words MARTIANS ARE. It is assumed here that Albright's radar set, used for communications with his Luna base, has failed. In such case it is unknown whether or not he will be able to repair it before his return since neither tools nor spare parts were included in his equipment.

General Arnold Dwight, New Albuquerque commandant, has revealed that a twenty-four hour watch is kept listening for further messages from the hero of the first Mars flight. The general also stated that failure of the radar set will not hinder the return flight of Lieutenant Albright to his Luna base. Although optimism is high, however, Dwight refuses to minimize the possibilities of...

* * *

From the Associated Press: Ankara, Turkey, July 13. — Military circles here have reported Eastern Confederation army leaders expect World War III to last less than three days. Present weapons they claim to possess, will mean complete destruction of all Western Alliance forces in that period.

* * *

From the United Press: Paris, France, July 13. — Marshal Henri Dumar, hero of Sedan in World War 1, predicted today that if hostilities broke out, the Eastern Confederation would be destroyed within forty-eight hours

under the impact of secret super-weapons developed by the Western nations. Calling upon his experiences of the first World War, the Marshal said....

* * *

From the International News Service: Washington, D.C., July 13. — It was revealed unofficially today that American military heads do not expect the pending war, if it develops, to last more than a matter of hours.

"Our defenses will hold until we have completely destroyed their military and industrial potential," one source close to the Pentagon is alleged to have stated. "Progress in the development of new and better..."

* * *

From the New York Telegraph: New Albuquerque, Luna, July 12. — There is still no further word from Lieutenant Philip Albright, pilot of the first rocket to reach Mars. More than forty-eight hours have elapsed since his radar equipment failed in the middle of a report to his Luna base.

General Dwight has revealed that Lieutenant Albright was scheduled to blast off for his return flight four hours ago. It is possible that...

* * *

From Station KIO: Ladies and gentlemen, in common with every radio and television station in North America, we interrupt our program to bring you a message direct from General Arnold Dwight, Commander of New Albuquerque, our Luna base.

Come in, General Dwight—

"Greetings, fellow Americans. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of the report I am about to make. I will state the facts barely and leave to my listeners the conclusions to be drawn.

"We have again, and for the last time, heard from Lieutenant Philip Albright. It would be impossible to convey to you just how much it means to me to reveal that it is now the late Lieutenant Albright, for we can only

suppose that he has perished.

"The omissions in the following message are his own; obviously he was hurried in getting the communication through. His last message reads:

"HAVE ESCAPED MARTIANS
TEMPORARILY STOP STARTLED
AT TERRA CONQUEST OF SPACE
STOP HAVE DISASSEMBLED
SHIP AND LEARNED SECRET OF
SPACE TRAVEL STOP ARE PRE-
PARING BUILD SPACE FLEET
ATTACK TERRA STOP BEWARE
OF..."

"Fellow Americans, that is all of the message. I need not point out to you the almost insurmountable difficulties Lieutenant Albright must have met with in his struggle to escape his captors and warn the human race of threatening disaster.

"I propose the following slogan to be used in man's struggle against these inhuman beasts from Mars.

"We Shall Come Again!"

* * *

Excerpt from the book "Inside Terra": President James Harford, of the United States, was about to make the shortest and the most effective speech of his career; a speech that would go down in the annals of oratory with the Gettysburg address, inspirational words of another president who fought for unity.

He stood before the assembled delegates of the United Nations. There was complete silence. He ran his eyes over them slowly, seriously. Then he spoke.

"Fellow Terrans," he said quietly, without inflection in his voice, "you are all familiar with the message received yesterday from the first human being to reach the planet Mars.

"I shall call Philip Albright, the man who sent that message, the first Terran hero. Not an American hero, fellow Terrans; Philip Albright is not of one nation, one race, one color, or

one religion. In his valiant and successful effort to warn earth, he represented *all* Terra. He belongs to all Terra.

"Fellow Terrans," President Harford paused for a long pregnant moment. "Fellow Terrans. United we stand..."

The rest of the sentence was drowned in the hysterical roar of cheers from the assemblage.

PHILIP ALBRIGHT flicked his cigarette away. *The things were too damned hard to smoke here anyway. If he smoked inside the ship, he soon had the confined space reeking with stale smoke. If he smoked outside, without his helmet on, of course, the thin air had him gasping for breath after one or two puffs.*

He looked out over the desolate waste that was Mars and grunted. What a planet! Not even the lowly lichens that the scientists had been quite sure would be found. Actually, Mars looked amazingly similar to Luna.

He glanced up into the sky and sought out Terra, and allowed himself a wisp of a smile. He didn't mind sitting out the rest of his life here on this barren waste, that part of it was all right; but he would have liked to have known whether or not he'd succeeded. After he'd sent that last lulu of a message, they'd cut off all radar sending.

He figured roughly that it'd be ten years, at the very least, before Terra even attempted to send another rocket here. The next time it would be a fleet, loaded for action.

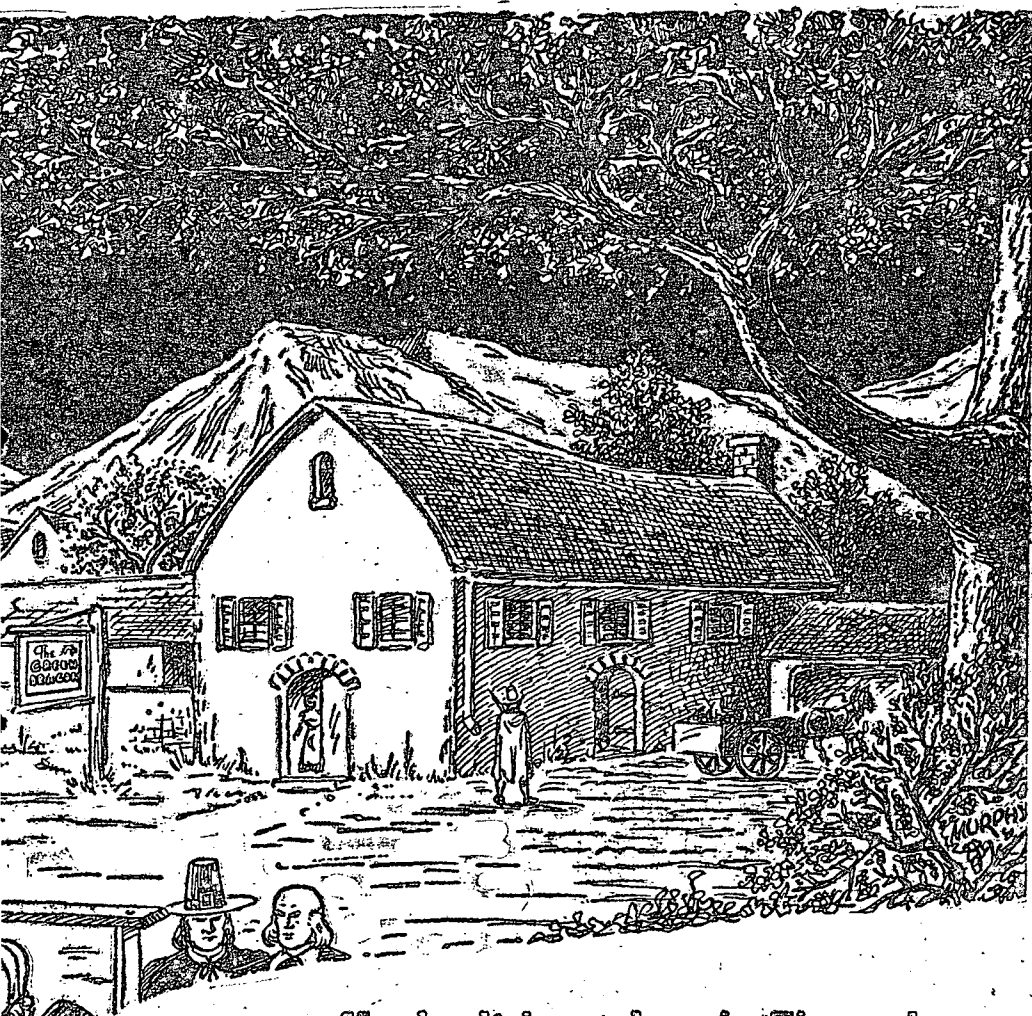
And by that time earth would be welded into one, united against a foe that didn't exist. United to such an extent that world government and peace would continue even after it was discovered that Philip Albright's message was a hoax.

The UNREMEMBERED

By Paul Lohrman



She was doomed to hang and he realized that, disembodied, he was utterly helpless



He dwelt in a place in Time where
two lives could run concurrently - and
where death could come in the same way

HE WAS a normal enough young man, entirely like other people except for a single peculiarity, and it was fortunate that he had noticed this variance in himself. The abnormality was his inability to conceive of and to understand time as other people did.

One of the first bewilderments of his life had been the way others referred to a past, a present, and a future. This he could not grasp. To him, time was

a oneness, a singularity, an indivisible thing. He understood, of course, that; to others, time was separable into three units. He knew this by the way they spoke and acted; but struggle as he might, he could not mentally picture the three rooms, the three entries; the three stages. He had memory and imagination, yet for him no past or future could exist. There were not three stages; there was but one, upon which time functioned.

He knew—and on occasion knew desperately—this conception was in high error, just as a man blind from birth knows there is something tragically wrong in his conception of things not visible. Yet, as the blind man, he was helpless in his abnormality and he made the best of it.

Otherwise, he was quite all right and not unhappy. An artist, he lived alone on the outskirts of a New England town in a hundred-year-old house left him by his parents. It was a town rich in tradition and one which would certainly abhor scandal.

But a scandal there was going to be. With a certain prescience of the ever-present, Adam Bane knew this. He knew the dusky-haired young woman standing there in his studio would signal its beginning by firing the pistol she held not four feet from his chest.

He sat staring at her and in his mind was the question: Why am I involved with this woman? Why does this cheap, sordid affair exist? How can I misinterpret emotions and make such a mistake as this?

The girl swayed slightly. She giggled and the giggle was like a pearl button drawn across glass. Drunk to a point far past self-control, she fumbled with words:

"Gonna kill ya. Gonna—gonna wipe ya out. You're a—a cad—that's what ya are!"

The pseudo-dramatics were to sickening even to be comic. He sat without moving. The gun was too far away to reach but, regardless, he would not have tried.

"Why do you want to kill me, Helen?"

The girl thought about it for a moment, then giggled again, before a certain inarticulate suffering appeared in her eyes. "Kill ya," she mumbled. "Then kill m'self. No fun anymore—no fun."

"Put the gun down, Helen. We'll talk it over—"

But the gun had been fired—

There was something—some unremembered thing in the vast present—that had always, it seemed, been vaguely in his mind. Now the urge to recall became suddenly intense and exerted a grotesque effect upon his senses. The bullet. It came slowly from the muzzle of the gun, pushed through a spurt of wispy smoke, and drifted lazily across intervening space. Straight toward his chest, it came, and he watched the feet and inches diminish, but he could not move or speak. There was a scrap of poetry, bright in his mind, elusive and tantalizing as old perfume.

*A face, as in some dim and
half forgotten dream,
A voice, long lost, like petals
on a rippling stream.*

Then the bullet touched his flesh—

THERE WAS nothing strange about the place. No sense of unreality came to Adam Bane, but one of familiarity. It was late afternoon and, nearby, a group of carpenters were putting away their tools. They'd completed the foundation and the upper framework of a house. They had just finished laying the corner stone upon which was carved, Salem—1620. Ale in pewter tankards had been served up to strangely garbed people, evidently in honor of the occasion.

To Adam, however, the ceremony was peculiar in its marked solemnity. There should have been a few smiles, even laughter. But there was none. The men drank their ale, shook hands quickly, and then hurried away, several of them glancing nervously toward the lowering sun.

He stood in the street, watching them disperse until only two laggard workmen were left. He moved close to them but they ignored him as though he did not exist. They were speaking, one to the other, and Adam heard:

"I am not certain that his motives are sincere in his affair."

"Careful, Tom. The girl was tried and convicted as a witch. Mercer is the magistrate and did but his duty."

"There was more to it," the other growled. "He sought to wed the girl and she refused. Scarcely a week passes and Mercer's wall-eyed brother falls in a fit at sight of her. I don't know about this witch business. It spreads like an epidemic of black plague."

"A comely lass is Patricia Allen. A shame that her pretty neck must stretch. But I must get my supper or I'll miss the hanging. And you, Tom. I'd not talk so much if I were you. These are dangerous times for a loose jaw. Good night."

Adam Bane was left alone in the quiet street, and as he stood there, a chill fall breeze sprang up and sent dry leaves scudding past his feet. A chill breeze, and the sun below the horizon, throwing back an aura red as blood.

He looked again at the cornerstone, at the letters and figures cut thereon—Salem, 1620—

Some unremembered thing in the vast present—a face, as in some dim and half forgotten dream.

Then the urgency in his mind was rewarded. The picture formed, in all its loveliness, and with it a certain knowledge of both time and substance. He hurried away, down the street and to the outskirts of the town where there stood a squat and ugly building. Its single window was studded with iron bars, and somehow he knew this building and what he would find inside.

She was huddled in a corner of the single room, crouched on the dirt floor like a lithe, beautiful animal brought finally to bay, and she was exactly as he knew she would be. The slim beautiful ankles, the hair like frosty goldenrod in two heavy braids, young breasts revealed beneath the single black garment she wore.

The great blue eyes alive with fear.

He knew, the moment he entered, that she sensed his presence. She glanced, even more fearfully, around the cold cell. She got to her feet and stood pressed against the wall, the black garment outlining her sleek form.

Then he realized: She can neither see nor hear me. She only knows there is a presence near. She'd retreated again to the far wall and he spoke, first softly; then he was screaming her name and his hands were on her, imploring, searching, seeking recognition.

But he knew her sense of him came from within. It was deep within her, because she neither heard his voice nor felt the pressure of his imploring hands.

A FEELING of almost panic came over him. Helpless. With the unremembered close in his arms, with the only love he'd ever known clear and sharp, soft and beautiful, lush against his heart, he was helpless.

Then the revelation. She spoke, a whisper from lovely lips against his cheek. "You've—come?"

"I've come, darling! Can't you hear me? Don't you *know*? Didn't you always know that somehow I'd get here—again?"

She heard him, but not in the prison; somewhere far away in the unremembered dream, she heard.

"I—I don't know. I knew you should have come. I have your picture from the old dreams."

The old and dusty dreams. For him,

the unremembered, back now in breathless reality.

His thoughts were desperate. Some god to pray to. Some kindly god not concerned with the ponderous things of great import. A god interested in the small things—the grains of sand on a beach, the struggle of atoms, the fading of the last rose in an autumn garden.

He saw her red lips move and he knew that she too was praying and he wondered if she had found the right god.

The lips formed into a smile. The whisper, turning into a cry. "You *are* here! I can feel your breath, your hand upon my heart!" She moved away from the wall. Her arms were reaching. "Your name was Adam, and you look just as you looked in all the dreams. I feel it now—the beating of your heart."

She seemed to weaken and slipped to the floor in his arms. He held her close and no moment had ever been, for him, like this fulfillment of the unremembered....

THE SENTENCE read, "—and to be hanged in the light of the moon." The moon was up. Round and full, it stood over the gibbet on the hill and they came in a procession to take Patricia Allen up the hill and hang her for a witch. Their footsteps sounded on the approach and she clung to Adam Bane.

"I'm afraid!" The terror bubbled in her throat. "Why do they have to do this to me? I haven't harmed anyone!"

He kissed her and held her tight in his arms. "Only one cold dark moment, my darling. It will be over in an instant and I'll be there with you."

"I'm afraid—afraid."

The door of the jail opened. The jailer said, "Did you hear that? As we came up to the door did you hear her mumble some incantation to her invisible familiars? Indeed this woman

is a witch. Let's have it done with quickly."

There was a crowd—white faces in the moonlight—as they walked up the hill to the gibbet. Adam walked close by the sobbing girl. "Don't let them know," he said. "Hold your head high and laugh at them the final moment. A courageous face breeds courage within. I'll be close, my love."

The hangman was masked. He wore a black robe and stood with his arms folded, a grisly figure against the night sky.

They took her up the hill and turned her over to his tender mercies. The noose was in his right hand and when Adam saw it settle around her lovely throat, all the cruelty and the injustice of this awful act swept through him and he was suddenly a mad man.

He hurled himself at the hangman. He sought to clutch the throat of this legal murderer, but the hangman went calmly on with his business.

In an agony of despair, Patricia, called out, "Adam—Adam! Where are you? I can't see you anymore," and a murmur went through the assembled crowd. "The name of her familiar. She reveals it on the scaffold. That must be entered in the records. It vindicates the judgment of the magistrate."

In a frenzy of rage, Adam seized a stone and smashed it down on the head of the hangman. But there was no stone, no impact, and the hangman reached out a great hand to spring the trap. Adam reached out and took the girl's stiff hand in his. He brushed his fingers across her lips and cried, "Patricia! My darling! I'm here by your side."

And in the crowd a hawkfaced woman croaked, "I heard it! I'll swear I heard the voice of her familiar. Hang the witch quickly!"

THE BULLET was boring in now and there was a great pain. Fire

unleashed inside his breast, driving the unremembered from his mind. From his mind but not from his heart.

The white face of the girl, the raven black hair of the girl, and the smoking gun were imaged in his eyes. He found movement in his legs and brushed past the girl and out the door. A yellow moon was bright above him and the unremembered welling in his heart. He struggled past the gate and across the road to another gate, old and rusty, that creaked under the pressure of his hand. There was a sob in his throat and the sob was a word: "Patricia! Patricia! I'm afraid to—die."

She was there, warm and soft, smiling, waiting for him. Her arms were close around him, her voice in his ear. "Only one dark moment, my love. One

brief moment, and I'll be here, holding your hand."

A policeman, off-duty, was telling his wife, "The dame got liquored up and shot the guy. Plugged him straight through the heart. Killed him in the cemetery west of town. We found him laying across one of those old headstones and you know what's funny? The dame claims she shot him in his studio and he walked a quarter of a mile with a bullet in his heart. She's a real screwball, that babe."

But the policeman neither noticed nor mentioned the vague inscription on the headstone:

PATRICIA ALLEN

1600—1620

A Lost Daughter of Satan.

THE END

"HOT-ROD HELLIES"

BY

SANDY MILLER

IT WAS A cool clear night, though pitch-black without the scudding of the moon.

The two policemen sat comfortably in the cabin of the 'copter, listening to the quiet sighing of the blades overhead. The machine hung at eight hundred feet—high enough to watch the surrounding countryside, yet low enough to be inconspicuous.

"Think they'll try again tonight?" Mike Flanagan asked his partner.

"Who knows?" Vaughn Glane shrugged. "The damned kids are liable to try it anytime."

Suddenly he quickened, stiffened, and nudged Mike. "Over there," he said, pointing out the window. Barely discernible and at least five miles away, a chain of faint lights was rising into the sky.

Mike touched the stud of the videophone; "Four seventeen," he said quietly into the phonepiece, "reporting an assembly of the kids. Shoot patrols out and it looks like we'll grab them. But hurry and send plenty of speedsters. You know these kids."

The voice came back over the speaker: "—if it's the last thing I'll do, I'll throw a scare into this bunch. If there's another accident—" he left the sentence unfinished.

Mike eased the 'copter into a gentle crawl toward the lights. He'd take it easy until reinforcements came, so that they stood a chance of bagging the "hot-rod hellies" as the boys dubbed themselves.

Ever since one crazy kid had read about the romantic hot-rodders of fifty years ago, dozens of boys of the teen agers had taken

'copters—conventional jobs—rigged them up with small jets—in a few cases, rockets—and made a practice of racing and terrorizing ordinary citizens.

Now the cops were out for blood. There had been a half-dozen fatal accidents involving the "hellies" and the police were determined to stop them. This was the first concerted raid.

The video finally showed lights and the phone crackled with acknowledgements of positions. The cops were ready to swoop. Opening throttle wide, the police roared in on the two or three dozen 'copters poised to start their dangerous activity.

The surprise was complete. The boys' ships were as fast as those of the police—but the element of surprise disconcerted them completely. Most surrendered to the police 'copters at once but three or four dare-devils opened gunning engines and roaring rockets and made a desperate push.

The police were prepared. Quickly, pairs of police 'copters boxed them, first with the glare of brilliant searchlights, then in pairs, swooping alongside the potential criminals and forcing them to cut their throttles—sometimes at gunpoint.

It was a subdued bunch of young hellions who faced the judges in the morning and watched their licenses revoked, the while they were forced to attend official 'copter handling schools.

"The trouble is," one veteran judge said with a snort, "that these boys think the Twentieth Century was romantic..."

THE ANCIENT GEOMETRICAL MONUMENT

Article 7 — The Day

By ROCKY STONE

(Note: This is the seventh of the TAG-M Series of Articles which begins the primary disclosure of the fundamental principle of man which is the real and the genuine scientific basis for government (political science), jurisprudence (science of law), psychiatry (science of treating mental disorders), psychology (science of human nature), as well as being the necessary factor required in all life experience.)

BASIC AND genuine facts regarding man have already been uncovered and verified, while these great scientific facts are backed up and supported not only by the complete known experience in *the past of man*, but also by what is enshrined in the first great wonder of the world; the Great Pyramid, which is apparently the chief displacement cornerstone of the hyper-cube, TAG-M— The Ancient Geometrical Monument.

The mental giants of long ago, the M-giants, had put man thru more than a "test-tube", and what they understood about man should be everybody's business today. Just the proved ability of the M-giants not only to have planned, but to have also made sure of the erection of this priceless time-capsule, the Great Pyramid,—(which has been opened on time)—is staggering and almost unbelievable to the minds of even the most learned persons.

Yet it has happened, and not only has the mystery of the Great Pyramid been solved, but solutions have been achieved for several basic problems concerning man. The six articles of the TAG-M Series up-to-date have disclosed that the famous six truncated

pyramids (symbols of *the past, the present subjective instant, and the future of man: the past, the present objective instant, and the future of the physical events of nature*) are anchored and oriented to the CUBE OF INFINITY (symbol of the CHAMBER OF THE ENLIGHTENED and the CHAMBER OF THE GRAND ORIENT of ancient prophecy). The CUBE OF INFINITY enshrines all time and with the six truncated pyramids of the hyper-cube gives the genuine scientific symbol for time, the fourth dimension, which is the measurement for all forms of energy which grow into, permeate, and resurge from mass or physical forms.

It will not be too long in the future until engineers generally will use the hyper-cube as the model for measurements in proportion of all forms of energy in relation to the wavelengths and-or sizes of particles. EACH OF THE SIX TRUNCATED PYRAMIDS OF THE HYPER-CUBE WILL BE EMPLOYED FOR THE MEASURE FOR THE VARIOUS SIZED SQUARES OF ALL FORMS OF ENERGY IN RELATION TO WHAT EACH TRUNCATED PYRAMID SYMBOLIZES, WHILE THE

SIX TRUNCATED PYRAMIDS AND *THE CUBE OF INFINITY* PRODUCE THE HYPER-CUBE WHICH WILL BE EMPLOYED TO EPITOMIZE THE MEASUREMENTS OF *THE CUBES* OF ALL FORMS OF ENERGY IN RELATION TO THE GROWTH INTO, THE PERMEATION OF, AND THE RESURGENCE FROM MASS OR PHYSICAL FORMS. (This method for measurement of the various forms of energy is already being employed abroad—so when you hear from other sources in the future about the uses of the hyper-cube—don't forget that you first heard about it in AMAZING STORIES.)

For those of you who might not understand the CUBE OF INFINITY and its function, the following may suffice: Draw a line and point off the center of the line. On its right-half side point off $1/2$ of the remainder which leaves $1/4$ of the original line.

Similarly point off $1/2$ of the $1/4$ of the original line, which leaves $1/8$ of the original line. Point off $1/2$ of the $1/8$, which becomes $1/16$,—and then $1/2$ of the $1/16$, which leaves $1/32$.

Halving the $1/32$ and continuing the halving, you obtain $1/64$, $1/128$, $1/256$, $1/512$, $1/1024$, $1/2048$, etc., and the halving progresses in measurement to the hundreds of thousands, the millionths, the billionths, etc., but you can never arrive at nothingness, or zero.

It can now be disclosed that the basis of matter, mass, or physical forms had been so analyzed to its n th degree by the ancients, that they were far ahead even on problems and their solution about which today's scientists have only speculated.

You must have heard about the more than a million germs on the point of a pin—and you must have heard, some-

what vaguely, that today's research scientists are even now attempting to measure atoms and parts of atoms in a form of measurement which corresponds to the millionths of an inch. Does the CUBE OF INFINITY attain greater value in your consciousness???

Everywhere around you are the so-called molecules and "atoms" in mass or physical forms—and besides those are other forms of energy of which you could not conceive of today, any more than in 1910 you could have understood the wavelengths of radio.

Measurement with classification, *and not classification alone*, is genuinely scientific. Thus, gravitation, heat radiation, magnetism, and all other forms of energy have both their measurement and classification in the hyper-cube, the so-called "tesseract" which has been hunted for by research men for years.

The Great Pyramid's construction came to a "point" at its summit—but its top construction disclosed the truncated top since the white limestone casing was stripped, and left the clue which intelligent research detectives of our generation followed.

The CUBE OF INFINITY and its true function could not and can not be seen by the unaided physical sense of sight, the human eye, and could only be demonstrated in the Great Pyramid by the so-called "King's Chamber" (Upper Light Chamber) and the so-called "Queen's Chamber" (Lower Light Chamber) with the passages or corridors and 'ventilators' which are within the visible spectrum of radiant energy—from the visible base of the Great Pyramid (symbol of the wavelength of red) to $1/2$ of its base-length (symbol of the wavelength of extreme visible violet), which is measured across *above* the so-called "King's Chamber", and the five 'chambers of construction' which are

above it. (The Great Pyramid is only an enlarged proportion for the displacement cornerstone for the hypercube, TAG-M, whose function is even more than the measurement of all forms of energy.)

When the fundamental principle of man (a principle is the combination of both law and ethics which is enforced by the power of nature, itself) is disclosed in the next few articles of the TAG-M Series, the reason for the geometrical construction of the Great Pyramid and TAG-M should be better understood.

It is about time to tear aside the so-called "Iron Curtain" which Charles Kettering said "is kept down on how much we do not know, which is practically everything." It is time to "remove the button from the foil", to "snatch the battle-ax from its sheath", and to "fire a time-torpedo" at the weakest of the sciences "behind the iron curtain" in relation to man—psychiatry.

As you know, before the correct solution to any problem can be achieved and attained, the problem itself must be correctly understood,—or as Kettering, himself, found out, "Any problem completely understood is fairly simple."

Kettering also believes that research is neither high-brow nor nuts, and to him, "Research is an original method of finding out what you are going to do when you can't keep on doing what you are doing now."

It appears to be becoming more and more self-evident that the people of this world cannot continue "to keep on doing what they are doing now," especially in the field of psychiatry.

You must understand that words are only symbols, being built from the alphabet which are but symbols, but it is the correct meaning which words symbolize that must be understood. Yet today our generation does not

have, *in any language*, a complete dictionary *with complete and correct definitions of words*. Since the first symptom of a civilized society is definiteness in language, judge present-day human society for yourself.

Many jurists, psychiatrists, psychologists, and informed persons have realized that since there is apparently no exact and genuine scientific basis which would allow both psychiatry and psychology (as well as jurisprudence) to become genuine sciences, "These have remained pseudo or false sciences, which has forced the great majority of both psychiatrists and psychologists to remain only a high over-rated flock of scientific guessers or pseudo-scientists."

This condition has apparently caused a great number of rackets. As Norma Lee Browning, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune, pointed out around August 7, 1949, "one of the most fertile fields for quackery in recent years is the field of psychology and/or psychiatry. A legitimate psychiatrist must have a medical degree, plus further training in psychiatry. One school of thought holds that even so-called legitimate psychology and psychiatry is, if not outright quackery, at least 90 percent hokum of the kind that invites charlatans to prey (at high prices) on the mentally and emotionally ill."

This does not mean that the intelligence I.Q., and the character C.Q. of all doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists are far below natural par, for the simple reason that there are the intelligent with character as well as the dumbly and the maliciously ignorant among any group. Even Buddha cracked, "Ignorance is the source of all evil."

Believe it or not, it will be actually amusing to future generations to estimate just how many "screwballs and un-American crackpots" were in the U.S.A. during the time of our genera-

tion. (Ever since Thomas Jefferson, it has been observed that anyone who arises above mediocrity in the U.S.A. is "given the works", unless he protects himself or is protected from the activities of the "screwballs and un-American crackpots" of his time,—even though the Bill of Rights is in reality not just a "scrap of paper", but is definitely the result of centuries of man's experience of life.—Is it any wonder that many Europeans, not to mention others, call U.S. citizens uncultured???)

Due to the ignorance of and the lack of an exact scientific standard which would allow jurisprudence, psychiatry, and psychology to become genuine sciences, the administration of mental hospitals in the U.S.A. has to a more or less extent been evilly dictatorial.

Attendants, as the union of Mental Hospital Attendants know, are not given clear and lucid instruction; if any instruction be given, of what a neurosis or psychosis consists. Frankly, even the doctors themselves are a little hazy on this point.

Nurses, if there be any, are likewise stymied.

And a large number of doctors in mental hospitals actually prey upon the ignorance of not only attendants and nurses, but also of patients and their families. It has been one of the most lucrative of rackets.

The paraphrase, "Mental hospitals are a trust, and the attendants, doctors, and nurses are trustees, and both the trust and the trustees are for the benefit of the patients," appears to be either ignored or uncomprehended. There will be many charges of criminal negligence and criminal insanity which will be successfully followed through during the next ten years, and many doctors will find themselves as patients in a criminal insane asylum.

Psychiatry is only the science where-

by correct knowledge of man is used in a method whereby abnormal human action, behavior, and conduct, from either ignorance of mental disorders, are prevented and cured. Psychiatry is both mental and physical and its interactiveness and interdependence in relation to both the human mind and body must be understood to be used. Too, if there be no exact scientific standard for normal human action, behavior, and conduct, who could judge what is normal and abnormal?

The M-giants understood what was normal or abnormal in human action, behavior and conduct, and what they epitomized in their time-capsule, has been verified. The Rockefeller Foundation will be given the opportunity, without having to spend money, to have the facts about what is normal in human society. It is a fact that you cannot change human nature, but the ignorance rampant about what human nature is under the enforced laws of nature has caused chaos and confusion in human society.

In future generations, a judge for a court of law will be required to understand psychiatry, especially since law is only the method whereby human action, behavior, and conduct are controlled by proper rules and regulations, and psychiatry is only the scientific method whereby abnormal human action, behavior, and conduct can be prevented and cured.

Intelligent persons have already realized that, "There are too many men in long pants and too many women in so-called long dresses who are running around in mental rompers and diapers." Even some members of the F.B.I.—and the F.B.I. is supposed to base its action upon the science of law—have realized this truism, which has been understood by real psychologists for many years.

An American writer in his "Outposts of Science" has disclosed that U.S. citi-

zens cannot point with pride or scorn to any American who had contributed to the field of psychiatry. As psychiatry is today, before the disclosure of the M-giants' wisdom regarding man, it appears to be not only the weakest, but also the most false or pseudo of the sciences, and it is apparently but in its "baby or infant stage". Mental disorders and illnesses have not been understood and have been feared; even so-called mental hospitals of the past, insane asylums, were usually built in an out-of-the-way place, and often not too much care, or even common sense (which is very uncommon), was taken to see to it that the "doctors" were men of intelligence with character.

Today, most legislators, along with many others, are but laymen and do not understand the problems in psychiatry and proper psychiatric treatment, and they are apparently ignorant of the fact that the administration of mental hospitals is still in the period of the "dark ages."

Young men and young women of intelligence with character will have a wonderful opportunity in the future reorganized field of psychiatry, especially when the hokum artists and ignorance are eliminated legally according to nature.

Perhaps many of you have never realized fully that the American Medical Association is only a union of doctors, somewhat similar to the union of plumbers; the American Bar Association is only a union of lawyers, somewhat similar to the union of electricians, while the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association are similarly union-like.

Future generations will chuckle with delight when they realize the impasse reached by certain members of our generation, not one of whom apparently does not have delusions on

some subject or other. In 1950, the world itself is nothing else but the giant nut-house for human society; some nations preparing for war on other nations, everyone perceiving to a more or less extent that war is but a psychosis which is the medical term for insanity. Even Goering, who committed suicide instead of being hanged, stated that war is but a psychosis, yet although he had participated, he was not charged with criminal insanity, but was given other charges which did not altogether cover his particular activities. And all this came about simply because people or human society had not yet mentally evolved to a high enough point on the FREEDOM FROM IGNORANCE scale where the actual and enforced laws or methods of action of nature in relation to man would be understood,—and obeyed.

The future will bring great advances and opportunities to man, providing the harsh lessons of the next ten to fifteen years are learned.

The author of "The Mature Mind" said, "Mature insight is lost upon immature minds,"; and it is a question whether or not there is a high enough I.Q. and C.Q. in our generation which will allow naturalness and normalcy to be possible under the laws of nature in this generation.

Du Noy in "Human Destiny" mentioned several things which have already arrived and will come to pass. And even Fred Rodell, professor of law at Yale University, pointed out in "Woe Unto You Lawyers" that lawyers and judges were the first to be led to the guillotine in a revolution. But what of just a mental evolution? ARE THERE ENOUGH LAWYERS AND JUDGES OF INTELLIGENCE WITH CHARACTER TO GUIDE THEIR FELLOWS?

History is full of examples of what happens to a person who attempts to present new discoveries to the people

of his period of time. Let it be hoped that there are Americans today who are really adult.

As it was pointed out in Article 1., Louis Daguerre, the discoverer of photography, was imprisoned in a Paris insane asylum. The superintendent of this particular insane asylum showed criminal negligence in not finding out whether or not Louis Daguerre harbored delusions about being able to take pictures. In fact, this doctor was guilty of harboring the delusion that Daguerre was harboring a delusion about what is known now as photography, and this doctor was apparently guilty of criminal insanity.

Stephenson, the inventor of the locomotive, would have been imprisoned, if the "screwballs and un-American crackpots of his day" had had their way, simply because he stated that speeds of thirty miles an hour were possible.

During the Civil War, if anyone had stated that it would be possible to travel 1000 to 2000 miles per hour in the 1950's, he would have been treated as a lunatic, and most likely mobbed.

Freud, the pioneer in psychiatry, was black-balled. Pasteur, to whom many of us owe our lives today, had a terrifically hard experience educating the people of his time as to how germs should be combatted.

Theology means THE SCIENCE. But look at what happened to Jesus of Nazareth, who was "given the works" simply because he tried to give human society an advanced idea of the genuine science of man. And Jesus did not die to save the people of his time from their sins, but he actually died because of the sins of the people of his time who murdered him.

Mohammed had to flee from Mecca to Medina, but he finally learned how to protect himself, resulting in devastation to opponents.

There are very few doctors today

who have the time for research, in fact most doctors can not keep up with the present-day discoveries in their field of endeavor.

Since actual genuine facts concerning man can be presented in the next few articles, it may be wise for you to realize something about the author of these articles.

The author of these TAG-M articles has already been "given the works" years ago, and he does not care to be a hero, so he did not care to be a martyr. Lincoln's "As I would not be a master, so I would not be a slave" is real common sense.

One of the biggest events in human history is coming about before your eyes—in fact, "The hopes and fears of all the years" are bound up with the presentation of the scientific facts from the ancient time-capsule, the Great Pyramid, and are coming to their culmination. And you can, providing the editor of AMAZING STORIES is willing, receive hitherto unrevealed facts which belong to the heritage of man and the establishment of the dignity of the individual.

On an important operation like this, no quarter can be asked, nor will any be given.

So you can rest assured that facts, genuine scientific facts, will be fired at you from "the pit", the original foxhole.

Anyone who has the mental picture that what will be presented is false has that for an opinion—and an opinion which cannot be verified finally in any way, is a delusion, and a delusion is the essence of a psychosis which is the medical term for insanity.

You may as well know now, that with the proper equipment and chosen assistants the science of man can progress faster in the next 35 years than it has progressed in the last 3500 years.

(Concluded On Page 194)



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

RECENTLY I had to do an article on how to write science fiction for some publishers' and writers' journal; or other. I don't know which one, nor whether it will even be accepted. In it I gave a formula by which experienced writers could break into the growing science fiction market. That formula by no means described every class of story in the field; but it gave a nice safe system for a sure sale of an entertaining story.

The key to a stf story is what is called a basic premise. A stf basic premise is an idea or an assertion that is not known to be true, which must be assumed as true for the sake of the story. Ordinarily it shouldn't contradict accepted theories of science.

I say ordinarily it shouldn't, but if all science fiction were to follow the formula, then it would soon degenerate into a compact field like mystery stories, where the formula is that someone must be killed by someone, so that someone else can find out who did it.

In my own writing, formulae have been incidental. Plots have also been incidental. In real life you find people's lives following plots quite hack-like, without them planning it that way. The only difference between real life and fiction in that respect is that in fiction the uninteresting must be ignored.

Every story I've written could have been done much better. I wonder if perhaps that hasn't been a strength in them? In real life every story could be much improved by *if living*. In fiction even the confusion must be well oiled, and the characters must react both as human beings and as instruments for carrying the story along. In a way that is necessary, if days or hours of intense, purposive action are to be portrayed realistically in a half hour's reading. But in real life more often than not the characters miss their cues, fail in the pinch when everyone is depending on them, and the endings are undramatic and often exasperating. Very seldom are they pat and fully satisfying, so round and so fully packed that they satisfy, so that you would walk a mile to get in on them; etc., (to be fair to all cigaret brands).

Be that as it may, the characters in a science fiction story are there for a purpose. Take them out of the story and you have an article, like Leibnitz's essays on

Monads which were the basis of Venusian beliefs in "M'Bong-Ah", or Fifteenth Century philosophy where reality is thoughts in the mind of God, which formed the basis of the Matrix stories.

Every science fiction story could be improved in the writing if the writer wrote an essay first, and then built the story on the essay. Some essays would be book length, but well worth it. For example, a space opera should be based on a thorough study of what space and space travel would be like. Instead, most of them do little more than project aviation into a negative vacuum between celestial bodies.

A bem story usually creates a distorted jigsaw construction from known body-members. But there has been a large number of bem stories that were written on well thought-out theories of alien life forms.

But however poorly thought-out the basic premises, the story itself must essentially be about authentically real people, meeting the problems presented by the "existence" of that basic departure from known or experienced reality.

THE BASIC appeal of science fiction is one inherent in our age, the twentieth century. A man fixing a flat on a lonely paved highway is essentially science fiction come to real life. A man living three days' walk from the place he works, driving his own car back and forth to work, living in the complexity of the modern world with all its gadgets, is living science fiction. It's a fairly simple matter for him, in imagination, to step one step further, into the unknown, and from his adjustments to autos and airplanes and refrigerators and television make the adjustments to new scientific inventions through the reactions of his counterpart, the hero.

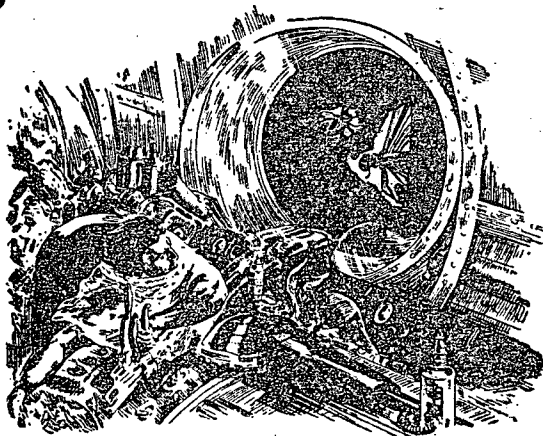
In real life we are all more or less living stf lives, from the totally unscientific Joe who buys a car on time and a television set the same way, and calls in an expert when they stop working, to the superspecialist scientist in his laboratory as he wrests the secret of tomorrow's gadget or improvement from the womb of nature.

There is a reason why science fiction doesn't appeal as much to other countries as it does to people in the U.S. In Squeedunk, Mongolia, the village banker couldn't possibly adjust his imagination to the back-

(Continued On Page 184)

How A Space Pilot Fell In Love With The Thoughts Of An Insect

"My Best Science Fiction Story" as Chosen by 25 Outstanding Authors—Edited by Leo Margulies and Oscar J. Friend



NOW, for the first time, the spine tingling thrills of the very best in science fiction, brought to you in all the startling wonder and amazing detail of a trip through the vast darkness of space, trillions of miles away from earth. Here is the most fascinating, thrilling reading of all. Experience a trip to Mars or a journey through time. Find out what happens as you plunge through space at jet-rocket speed.

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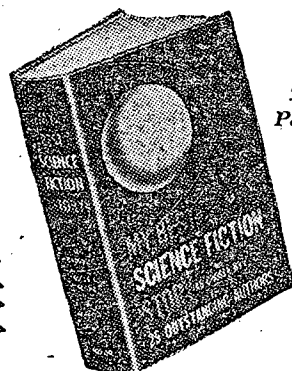
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Grief Of Baghdad by Arthur K. Barnes.
The Teacher From Mars by Eando Binder.
Almost Human by Robert Bloch.
Zero Hour by Roy Bradbury.
Nothing Sirlin by Frederic Brown.
Blindness by John W. Campbell, Jr.
Visiting Yokel by Cleve Cartmill.
The Hibernated Man by L. Sprague de Camp.
The Thing In The Pond by Paul Ernst.
Wanderer Of Time by John Russell.
Fear.
The Inn Outside The World by Edmond Hamilton.
The Professor Was A Thief by L. Ron Hubbard.
Don't Look Now by Henry Kuttner.
The Green Hills Of Earth by Robert A. Heinlein.
The Lost Race by Murray Leinster.
The House Of Rising Winds by Frank Belknap Long.
The Carriers by Sam Merwin, Jr.
Doctor Grisham's Sanitarium by Fletcher Pratt.
The Uncharted Isle by Clark Ashton Smith.
Thunder And Roses by Theodore Sturgeon.
The Ultimate Catalyst by John Taine.
Project-Spaceship by A. E. Van Vogt.
Space Station No. 1 by Manly Wade Wellman.
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(Continued From Page 182)

ground of a stf story the way an American kid with his hotrod could. It would be too much of a jump.

But science fiction is a natural expression of our age here in America. We are actually living the greatest science story ever written.

In the preceding centuries a few of the basic ideas for the story were thought of and jotted down. Mendel, Darwin, Hertz, Pasteur, and some others thought up a few basic ideas; Napoleon and some others dreamed up parts of the plot.

The story itself began exactly fifty years ago, the first chapter swiftly congealing into action and tightness, the plot inherent in it from the first page.

It built up and let down and built up, growing more and more complex. We have just finished the first half of the book, a masterpiece of plotting. The minor plot of World War II has nicely congealed into an ending which contains the elements of the story plot tying it to the pages that are about to turn.

The Russians getting the atom bomb in the latest chapter was a trifle corny, but doesn't seem so because the suspense is terrific and the pace is swift. The mystery of the flying saucers points toward a new development. We are chewing our fingernails in suspense over whether the world is doomed or not, whether another war is coming, how soon travel to the moon will come, and all the thousands of little ramifications of plot that make the story.

The characterization is so vivid that many of us have projected ourselves completely into the story, eagerly turning each page, our minds working at high speed trying to figure out what's coming next.

Kibitzers are if-plotting right and left. If we declared war on Russia right now we could lick them with the atom bomb—but then we would be starting a precedent of aggression that we would have to follow up. If we did this, if we did that...

But however we kibitz, the story is unfolding at the touch of a Master Story Teller, and tomorrow's page will be just a little different than any of the kibitzers' ideas—and a lot better, as it should be. Action will be there. Suspense. Drama.

THE GUY who said the telephone book has a terrific list of characters, but no plot, was just being funny. The plot is there, obviously, and its being there presents an intriguing problem.

I write my stories the way I live, with no rigid plot sketching beforehand. Some authors write their stories knowing before they start just what the ending will be.

Is this age being unfolded the way I write a story—or the way a story craftsman writes one? It's an intriguing problem with evidence for both theories—with the inevitable question that if it's plotted already, who or what is doing the plotting and writing of it?

How do men like Hitler and Stalin and Roosevelt and Truman arise? When you study their careers and see how impossible the train of events was that brought them to the heights, you wonder. How did Truman get the Vice-Presidency? Almost obviously if he hadn't gotten it he wouldn't have been running for President last time. How would things have gone with Wallace for our current President? Would he have ordered the use of the atom bomb? And what prompted Roosevelt to gamble billions to make an untried atom bomb? It isn't real life. It's science fiction made real. It's more than that, really.

The creation of Israel as a sovereign nation was no surprise to millions of people. Speaking for myself, I accepted it as a coming fact before the first World War, because my dad took it as an obvious fact. It's in the Bible.

Did Israel become a nation because it was prophesied, so that the prophecy put the idea there, the idea fathered the reality? Or was the prophecy part of an already conceived plot of some master story teller, unfolding the story of this century with swift jabs of his index finger against the keys of some cosmic typer?

If there is such a story teller at work on us, there seems no way of ever being sure—and that too is a part of the suspense of today.

What would be the nature of such a master story teller? One answer, the obvious one to many people, would be that he is God. The trouble with that answer is that no one really knows what that means. Once, as a sort of study, I asked many of my friends, one at a time, what they thought was meant by that word, God. I didn't argue. I just questioned, with my questions attempting to bring them out and find out what they really believed.

If the results brought any definite result, it was a conclusion that there is a separate God for each of those I talked with, or none of them knew what the word meant in any real sense. Most of them basically were either completely dogmatic, resting their attempt to define what they meant by the word on other words they didn't know the meaning of, or they were atheistic and afraid to admit it.

But even granting that YOUR idea of the nature of God is the correct one, it's quite possible that, assuming there is some co-ordinated intelligence dipping into human affairs on a world-wide scale, that intelligence is not the Supreme Being.

What it is may become clear by the end of this century. A lot of other things may become clear by the end of the century. We have fifty years ahead of us before the year 1999 A.D. closes, and its New Year ushers in the twenty-first century.

I'VE DONE a lot of thinking about those coming fifty years, and in the next two
(Continued On Page 186)

What Is Indelicacy in a Book? Or—

WHO IS OBSCENE? as a great defender of books in our courts asks more pungently in the title of a recent book of his.

America suffers of a vast variety of censorships—state, federal, local—

But the most insidious of all censors we have found is the average American bookdealer himself.

When we first brought to him James Joyce's *ULYSSES* he held up his hands in pious horror. A few years later, when the book was D. H. Lawrence's *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*, he held up his nose as well as his hands. He stocks both of them now, that they have become modern classics.

The same reception was accorded our reprint of Charles-Louis Philippe's *BUBU OF MONTPARNASSE*. Even Nobel Prize Winner T. S. Eliot's *Introduction* didn't help. For the bookdealer this great work remains nothing more than a chronicle of the lives of the men and women who make up the sidewalk traffic of Paris.

When, more recently, we came to the bookdealer with Michael Sadleir's *FORLORN SUNSET* the delicacy had become class-delicacy. This great author's previous work, *Fanny By Gaslight*—which concerned itself with the predominately vicious amusements of the rich—was allowed to be pyramided into best-sellerdom. Because *FORLORN SUNSET* shows with great care the effect of this overwhelming sensualism on the lives of the poor the censorial hands and nose went up again.

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(Continued From Page 184)

or three Club House editorials I'd like to discuss some of the things that I think will happen. The things that are obvious I won't touch upon. For instance, color television is a cinch. Politics and historical prophecy such as predicting war or no war are touchy subjects and better left alone.

It's in the fields of science that the upsets are coming, and coming swiftly. There are, I believe, some major surprises in store for the human race in the fields of research. They are going to radically alter present directions of science, and also going to bring things completely unguessed by the vast majority of people at the present time. Some of those upsets will be major upsets in the "accepted beliefs" of science fiction itself! At least one of them will be the coming true of a science fiction dream of long standing.

My first prediction for the near future, the one I will discuss in detail next month, is that we will achieve space travel—BUT it will not be by rockets. It will be by a radically new principle that will not only eliminate from consideration the use of rockets, but also make obsolete most of our present aircraft.

My second prediction is that we will for the first time in known history make contact with civilized life that does not have its origin on our planet. That will be discussed the issue after next.

So sure am I that I'm going to be proven right that anybody who wants to put up a thousand dollars that says I'm wrong, just turn it over to me and I'll put it in my bank account until January first, 2000 A.D., and if you can prove I was wrong on even one thing I'll gladly give you back two thousand bucks. (Shhh! Don't tell him I'd make money even if I lost, on the accrued interest).

Anyway, save your quarter for the next issue of *Amazing Stories* and see what's going to happen that will make the Government throw away all those lovely rockets down New Mexico way.

But enough of this chitchat. We have some fanzines to talk about.

* * *

DAWN: 10c; bimonthly; a letterzine. Lester Fried, 2050 Midland, Louisville, Ky. Some feudin' is goin' on down there in Kentucky, via mail, in the columns of this letterzine, and after all, what's a letterzine for? To discuss Einstein's four new equations? The feuding seems to center around whether the N.F.F.F. does, or should do, anything but exist. As nearly as I can figure out from both sides of the argument, they agree that the National Fantasy Fan Federation has been a failure for the past four years. So I think I disagree with both sides. I think the NFFF has been a success during those years. To be sure, it hasn't been a well knit group following blindly the directions of its leaders, nor have its leaders been real Leaders in any cosmic sense. But the

NFFF has held together and has served several good purposes admirably. Right now it's a going concern and a real asset to fandom. F. Towner Laney asks, "What is the NFFF supposed to do?" I think if all concerned would take a look at the good it's doing right now—I mean actually doing—and forget great schemes that haven't come off, they would have to admit that the NFFF is a mighty fine group. Art Rapp seems to agree with me in his letter in *Dawn*.

R.G. White, besides taking a whack at Burbee, advances some interesting discussion on physical misfits in human society, and should they be weeded out, like we do to improve strains of animals.

There are some more letters pro and con on the NFFF, then Rick Sneary concludes the letter department with a rebuttal of Burbee's letter of last issue taking the NFFF to task. He then defends his contention that the NFFF should have the say as to where the World Science Fiction Convention should be held each year, rather than continuing the present system of voting. Rick is right in his statement that the three hundred NFFF members are definitely representative, and the voting would be impartial if conducted by that group. That may be true, Rick, but you are overlooking the fact that it would be bureaucracy. Your arguments could be used with equal validity to advocate that the Democratic party should take over the control of voting for President—and has the same inherent evils. Not in choosing the convention site, but in who is going to run the actual convention.

We'd better get on to the next fanzine. Otherwise we'll be discussing this feud forever. I love feuds. They're fascinating!

FANSCIENT: 25c; winter, 1950 number; Donald B. Day, 3435 N.E. 38th Ave., Portland 13, Ore. A pocket size zine of exceptional craftsmanship. Its artwork is the best that can be obtained in fandom. Last issue, if you remember, it had a four color cover. It's back to black and white again, but the cover is very good—both the front and back covers. Miles Eaton did the front one and Forrest C. Davis the back one. Bruce Berry, Jim Bradley, and John Grossman did the interiors. Lin Carter has a nice story, "The Castle Beyond the World". Miles Eaton discusses Lilith in Legend, with a picture of her by Berry.

The real highlight of the issue is a pictudes, Major; there's an impassable barrier together with a short self sketch by the author in his own medium, words, and a list of his published works, totalling fifty-four stories, if my count was correct. I met George O. at the Cincinnati convention. Therefore his life story is very interesting, even though, as he says, "this magazine is expected to go through the mails so that eliminates about half of it right there." But what he does divulge concerning his interesting life is written in the highly in-

(Continued On Page 192)

LOVE DEATH

BY
RALPH ORTIZ

HE HELD her tightly, pressing her to him, his arms locked like vises around her slender body. Her arms clung around his neck.

"Darling," she whispered, her soft tones echoing in the cavernous ruins of the building, "never let me go. Hold me always. All we have is each other—but that's enough, isn't it?"

He let his lips play over her cheek. "We'll always be together, sweetheart," he said huskily. "This murderous war will end and then we'll have that home we've dreamed about. We'll..."

He felt Anne's body suddenly go stiff in his arms. A horrible glazed look came into her eyes. And simultaneously came the gentle plop of the heat-beam. Bill Thompson supported the sagging body of the girl with his left arm while he gazed in horror at his right hand, covered now with Anne's blood.

"Bill," Anne whispered, her eyes closed, "I—I—lo—" she broke off abruptly and her head fell to one side. Gently Bill lowered her body to the ground. His face

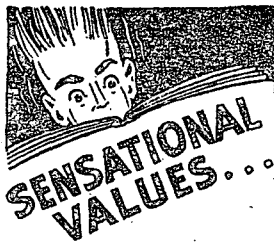
was a frozen mask. He peered into the darkness.

Suddenly he bent low and ran straight toward the spot from which the heat-pulse had come. His mind was fogged with grief and hatred and he did not actually think. He only knew that from somewhere in this direction the fatal blast had come.

He held the broken bayonet in his right hand, Anne's blood still caking it.

Something scuttled up in front of him and Bill saw himself facing a Sov-soldier, the man's heat-blaster leveled at him. Bill's body stiffened and an instant later he felt the hideous blast sear his flesh. But it was too late to stop him. He reached, the astounded Sov-soldier, his powerful hands wrenching aside the man's weapon, and at the same time his bayonet fragment plunged itself again and again into the dying man's body. Nor did Bill cease then; only when the life had gone from both bodies, did the animal-rage cease...

The moon looked down on the broken ruins and the twisted torn bodies of the lovers and it seemed to smile—for they were reunited...



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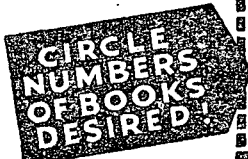
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The Reader's FORUM



WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE!

Dear Mr. Browne:

A short while ago I read through the February 1950 issue of **AMAZING STORIES**. Off and on, for the past several years, I've been reading **AMAZING STORIES**, and certain stories stand out, like with many things one does. Have been interested in science fiction for a few years, and having read through some of the stories in science fiction magazines, and then read of how they've predicted scientific events to come, I've often wondered if a few of those fellows are gifted with a mind that sometimes foresees events that will occur in the future.

There is a complaint that I have regarding a few of the stories, especially did I notice it in "The Galaxy Raiders", and that is the freehanded way they use God's name. To some it seems as tho it was just another word. There is one thing that is on the increase throughout our country, and that is the swearing, cursing, and the taking of God's name in vain, which I believe is a sign of weakness, poor command of the English language, and a definite disrespect and disregard of GOD.

Good science fiction stories I enjoy reading. At one time I'd planned to cut out many of the facts concerning strange happenings around the world, but I noticed many of them were printed on both sides; my intention was to collect and save them in a scrapbook.

Please let me hear from you.

M. W. Young

Box 484

Albert Lea, Minnesota

Our writers have no intention of being sacrilegious—any more than your editors intend permitting such a thing to get into print. But, in real life, people do get rough in their language under trying circumstances; so it must be (within reason, of course!) in fictional portrayal of real life.

—Ed.

MR. DYE'S GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

Dear Mr. Browne:

"Last Orbit" by Charles Dye takes first honors for your momentous return to S.F.

and all its environs. This is a story that simply pales all previous ones by its sheer power and sustained action. The details are never useless and the plot has some thinking behind it which does honor to the writer, Charles Dye. The Feb. issue is a fine promise of more stories to come that may compare with "Last Orbit". I would like to see more stories by this new author Charles Dye and hope his genius may bless your editions from this time forth. When we are on our "Last Orbit" let's have a copy of **AMAZING STORIES** along so we can press maximum life to its limit in a manner that only Charles Dye has yet been capable of.

It is very apparent that this young man has great promise and I only hope you will realize his talents in your publication because if you don't the time will come when your last orbit will be a sad one indeed.

June Walton

Box 7730

Washington, D.C.

A personal aside to Mr. Dye: If you think having your friends write such letters will result in a rise in rates, you're probably right!

—Ed.

A BIG IMPROVEMENT

Dear Editor:

The Feb. ish of AMZ was a big improvement over the Jan. ish. I especially like the short-short features. I like them so well I'm gonna try some myself! *Type-writer from the Future* was a good story. Henry Hasse had a good one, too. Glad to see you're going to have more new writers. The old authors are good, but they get in a rut after a few years of steady writing. If you'd use smaller type you could get a lot more words to the page. The best change you've made is the increase in pages. If you keep putting out a good mag I'll buy every ish!

J.T. Oliver

712-32 Street

Columbus, Georgia

While smaller type would result in more words to a page, you'd find reading more difficult, thereby cutting down your en-

joyment of the stories. Actually, the recent change in our magazines' type face increased its size, without cutting down the number of words to the page. —Ed.

IF IT WASN'T FOR THE ARTICLES...

Dear Mr. Browne:

This letter will no doubt reach you too late for publication. Anyway, my letters are never published, witty and readable as they are. But why be half safe? Why not be sure it won't get printed? So, here goes. Stories, mediocre as usual. Art, ditto. Articles, not bad for a change. Now, when are you going to get some stories from good authors like Kuttner, Hubbard, Sturgeon, and Bradbury? I also think you should get new artists. Incidentally, have all you "mad stf fans" seen a recent magazine (NOT stf) claiming that the flying discs are from another planet?

James Lewis
29-10 Butler St.
E. Elmhurst, N.Y.

A little matter of abuse isn't going to keep us from printing a letter. All we ask is that you tell us more than that a story is mediocre; tell us WHY you think it's so. And while we have a small amount of becoming modesty, we'll abandon it long enough to refuse to believe that an entire issue of selections by a trained editorial staff can be as bad as you say—unless you go into greater detail. And don't ever think such a letter will go unpublished! —Ed.

THE CASE OF THE CARELESS AUTHOR

Dear Mr. Browne:

Alas and alack, why must a fairly good narrative be spoiled by poor editing. Really, you should hire some more "research" readers who are specialists in their field. Take the case of "The Avenger" (Nov. issue). In it (shame on the author) she has her Egyptians and Arabs (I doubt whether she knows the difference) address the hero as "Sahib". Shades of India! An Egyptian, in Egypt, addresses his master as "Sidi" or "Effendi" (or any other title he may have up to "Pasha"), but not "Sahib", which is used in India. I know whereof I speak, having been born and raised in Egypt, though not an Egyptian.

Also, please give us a rest from Shaver and his inanities. When he becomes puerile enough to tell us that Louisiana was once called "Muisiana", he becomes ridiculous and it's time someone pointed out to him that while we readers indulge in reading fantasy, we don't swallow hogwash, and he is advised to humbly go to Churchward's "Mu" books and read a masterly theory on the origin of the alphabet and prehistoric languages.

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The author of "The Avenger" has not been in touch with us since publication of her story—although we're fairly certain no Egyptian has eliminated her for her mistakes. Perhaps she may see your letter and offer a defense.... Mr. Shaver, also, has not been in touch with this office in recent months, so your criticism must reach him through these pages. —Ed.

MR. DYE FINDS HIS ORBIT

Dear Mr. Browne:

O.K. Mr. Browne. In this, the February issue of AMAZING STORIES you gave us "Last Orbit", by Charles Dye and "Type-writer from the Future", by Peter Worth. These are two of the finest science-fiction stories I've ever seen in any mag, any time, any place. But the others!!!

"The Galazy Raiders", in spite of your rave blurb, fell flat on its face after the first two pages of problem-setting and scene-setting. If we're going to have thud and blunder space opera's let's at least have them of the caliber of "Last Orbit", which, incidentally, I'll wager will be voted by the fans as one of the best short stories of 1950. True, true, this could hardly be termed a space opera, but nevertheless, the action and melodrama was expertly handled. Say, is this guy Dye the same as the slick mag cover artist Charles Dye???

This month's cover by Jones was really something!!! I think it's the first pulp magazine cover I've seen that hasn't been painted in screaming reds, yellows, and blues. May I congratulate you and your art editor and, of course, Robert Gibson Jones. The inside drawings ain't so hot, as you no doubt are well aware. Leave us see this changed!!!

Hey!!! Who flubbed the dubb on author credit for "No Teeth For the Tiger"???

But in spite of all the above, or because of it, the magazine is much, much, better than it's usually been during these last few hectic months.

William Martin
338 South Washington
Wittier, California

All we know of Mr. Dye is that he writes a mighty fine story. Perhaps with the next one he sends us he may give some facts about himself.... Several readers have mentioned being confused by author credit on "No Teeth For the Tiger". Our copy of the issue shows, both on the title page and on the table of contents, that Paul Fairman was correctly listed as the author, with Hinton doing the illustration. —Ed.

HOW SILENT IS AN ENIGMA?

Dear Mr. Browne:

Congratulations on taking the helm of ye olde AMAZING STORIES—and on the amazingly good stories you served up in the February issue! No kidding, it's been long and long since the pulpy pages of

AMAZING have been so interesting.

Orchids of the ish go to Peter Worth for "Typewriter From The Future". Ah, what a gadget! Would that I had one! This one I'm using now not only can't write its own stories, it hasn't even learned to spell yet! As I was saying, I'm a sucker for time-travel stories, anyhow, and this was a honey. Er...might one ask embarrassing questions about pseudonyms? I think "Peter Worth" is really Rog Phillips. Oh, ya wanna be enigmatically silent, eh?

Next best is "The Last Orbit" by Charles Dye. Slam-bang-boom stuff. Something happening every minute, and people getting kicked in the teeth every second on the second. Keeps a story from being dull. "No Teeth-For The Tiger" (lousy title, that), by Paul Fairman, also rate favorable mention. I like stories with psychological themes, especially when they're well-written—and Fairman knows how to handle the words, all right. Describing the "adolescent gauntness" of a landscape, for example.

"The Pranksters" and "And No Tomorrow" were well-done, but on themes so often used before that much of their effectiveness vanished. Wonder how many times Earth has been a-bombed into a nova? But even with Hitler, Rog's gadgets are fascinating. That's why I think he's the guy who thought up that typewriter from the future. It's a typical Phillips' touch.

The remaining three stories were competent, but undistinguished. Still, that leaves five bullseyes out of eight, which is a hot batting average, if I may mingle a metaphor.

"The Club House" is the outstanding fan column in the field. Or do you think I'm prejudiced? Holy Roscoe, Rog seems to like my zines better than I do myself!

Well, here's hoping the rest of the issues for 1950 keep up to the standard set by the February AMAZING. Clear jets!

Art Rapp
2120 Bay Street
Saginaw, Michigan

We're always happy to give an answer to any question a reader brings up. "Typewriter From the Future" was written by a young man named Etain Shrdlu, whose by-line you've probably come across before this. And whaddaya mean—"No Teeth for the Tiger" was a lousy title? We dreamed it up ourselves, and went around in a pleasant glow for hours over what a fine job of retitling we'd done! Anyway, thanks for the congratulations and we'll do our best to keep you happy. —Ed.

This column is for you,
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THE CLUBHOUSE

(Concluded From Page 186)

interesting George O. manner, and is perhaps the greatest piece of fict—I mean the greatest thing he's written.

Meet the author is a regular feature in Fanscient, and for that reason alone it should be on your regular subscription list.

ORB: Dec.-Jan.; 15c; bi-monthly; Bob Johnson, 811 9th St., Greeley, Colorado, "with the help of Chas. L. Hanes." A mimeographed fanzine. And you know, with so many fanzines going in for a pro job of printing by the photo offset method these days it's a treat to see mimeography. Oh, oh. I spoke too soon. Opening it up I see eight pages of photo-offset and four pages of mimeography.

The cover, by the editor is a two color job depicting a large bird of weird design chatting with a large snake with a pointed, candy-stick horn, and teeth. Other illos are by John Grossman and Bob Johnson. Short stories, poems, and a readers column are authored by Sandy Charnoff, Chas. Hanes, Bill Warren, Ron Bourgea Lee Quinn, and the editor.

Best thing in the issue is a poem for a change. (I hate poetry.) The title is, "It's Dark Inside", and the first stanza is, "The Shadows whisper, And cease to flit Around the graveyard Wall, while IT Slithers from there To quietly sit, Because it's dark inside."

STF TRADER: 5c; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 3rd Ave. S., Moorhead, Minn.: This is an adzine, devoted entirely to the carrying of ads for selling, trading or advertising wants in stf. You can put an ad in for 50c a full page, or for as little as 15c for a small fraction of a page. Seventeen full pages of ads this time.

SPACEWARP: 15c, 8/\$1.00; Arthur H. Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Mich.: With it was sent a "Spacewarp Index" which lists the contents and authors of all thirty-three issues of this zine since its inception in April, 1947. You know, that's quite a record. Some of the finest original stuff of fandom has appeared in Spacewarp.

Art Rapp is famous for his annual predictions of coming events. He generally does it by riddles, then at the end of the year he explains how his riddles fit the events that did transpire, and were therefore true prophecy. But with this issue he makes a prophecy in plain English. I won't give all his prophecies here. Send for the zine if you want them bad enough, and take it from me they're worth sending for. But one thing he says is that in 1950 one of the big prozines will launch a commercially sponsored fanclub. I hadn't heard of such a thing, but I want to go on record as being agin it, I don't care what editor tries it. My reasons are these: (1) most

important of all, if such a fan group became a success, eventually pressure would exist tending to identify ALL fandom as being this group, and that pressure would have its bad effect on the present independent fandom with its fine record of individualism and common sense; (2) for a promag to enter fandom with its facilities for propaganda, it would be unfair competition to those individual groups "outside the fold of big brother—big brother being the prozine who did it." It could do little more for the fans than the Club House is doing right now, except maybe dole out money to those fans who rah-rahed the big brother, and the strict policy of the Club House is to support ALL fan activities equally by presenting their efforts in *Amazing* so that the readers can see them in their best light and get into fandom themselves. And the record of the past couple of years proves that this support has at least doubled fandom, without exacting a toll of obedience to big brother and his ideas. (Sure I sometimes have hit back in the pages of fanzines, but it has been for the fun of feuding, and I was always disappointed when whoever was slugging me stopped doing it.) In closing this subject I want to add that no matter how hands-offish the editor sponsoring a fan club might start out, he would inevitably favor his group over all others even to the point of not giving other groups space in his fanzine. He would eventually demand his say over the annual convention. He would have to be put in his place or be kowtowed to. So spurn all offers and keep your independence, fandom!

That should fix Art's prophecy! Top item in this issue of *Spacewarp* is undoubtedly "One of us Must Die", a short story by Warren Baldwin, though best title in the issue is "Tale of the Purple Perch", a poem by Rapp.

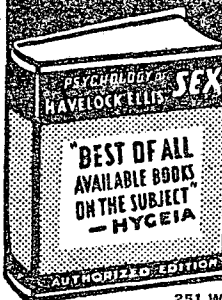
SHANGRI-LA: No. 16; 15c; Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, 1305 W. Ingraham St., Los Angeles 13, Calif.. That's one of the oldest and biggest fan-clubs in the world, and has a club house all its own. If you live in or near L.A., or plan on being there at any time, be sure and drop in on any Thursday evening and attend a meeting. You'll meet a few authors in all probability, because a lot of authors live around L.A. and attend meetings quite regularly.

Thirty-two pages, this issue contains such articles as "The Astounding Decline" by Alan Hershey, "To You Who Know", by Helene Mears, "A Generation of Reminiscence" by Clare Winger Harris, and a dozen more interesting articles and items.

The last page carries an announcement that the LASFS are now opening up associate memberships to non-Angelinos. If you want to join, send their treasurer a buck. In return you will get a buck eighty-five's worth of publications and a membership card.

—ROG PHILLIPS

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THE ANCIENT GEOMETRICAL MONUMENT

(Concluded From Page 181)

You are living in a great era. The end of the Old Order is but a matter of months, and you have the "sports" or mutants from the CHAMBER OF THE ENLIGHTENED to assist all men and women (as you might put it) of good will. Sounds like a science-fiction story of Prometheus II doesn't it? It is more than a science-fiction story, and as was pointed out in Article 1., truth is sometimes stranger than fiction.

You have read Sinclair Lewis' "It Can't Happen Here." Even he knew that it could, and it did back in October 1942. It may also be a shock for you to even suppose that there are weapons, efficient weapons, which could eliminate the earth's population by 300,000,000 in the first 48 hours of warfare. Don't you think that a little sanity might be advisable—from everybody?

The narrow-mindedness and stubbornness of some people to accept new verified facts, is simply due to the pattern in their physical brains and methods of thinking, which hold them back from understanding that which is.

In closing this article, the author trusts that you may appreciate the next few articles—and it is already known that you will never forget what is therein set forth. So, GOOD LUCK—and constructive criticism is always welcomed thru the new "Reader's Forum" in AMAZING STORIES

(Read Article 8 next month.)

THE END



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